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THESIS

**THE ORIGINS AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE
AL-QAEDA ORGANIZATION IN THE ISLAMIC
MAGHREB (AQIM)**

by

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December 2009

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**THE ORIGINS AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES OF THE AL QAEDA
ORGANIZATION IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB (AQIM)**

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ABSTRACT

In 2007, the Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) emerged after the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) aligned itself with Al-Qaeda. This development captured the world's attention and led several scholars and policymakers to ask the question: Why did this merger take place and what does it say about the motivations of GSPC? This research investigates three hypotheses: (1) This merger is merely an ideological one without operational implications; (2) this merger is ideological, operational, and logistical; or (3) this merger is merely a rebranding of a failing organization that needed to survive and, therefore, is not a genuine threat to the United States and its European allies. Exploring the evolution of Algerian Islamism, from the rise of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) to the GSPC and AQIM, this study concludes that hypothesis 3 is the best explanation of the merger between GSPC and Al-Qaeda.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AQ Central	Al-Qaeda Central
AOMA	The Association of Moslem Algerians <i>Ulama's</i> (Olamas or religious leaders)
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb land
FIS	Front Islamic de Salut (Islamic Salvation Front)
FNS	Fonds de Solidarité Nationale (Fund of National Solidarity)
GIA	Group Islamic Army (the Armed Islamic Group)
GSPC	Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat
GICM	Groupe Islamique de Combat (Moroccan Islamic Combat Group)
ILP	Islamic Liberation Party (Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami in Arabic)
LIFG	Libyan Islamic Fighting Group
MTI	Islamic Tendency Movement
NLF	National Liberation Front, well known by its French abbreviation (FLN)
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
UN	United Nations

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

The Islamic Salvation Front (Front Islamic du Salut or FIS, as known by its French acronym), was formed and legalized as a political party in Algeria in 1989. In 1990 and 1991, the FIS won both local and regional elections. The group was poised for sweeping legislative victories in the National Assembly when the military nullified the elections in January 1992. The FIS was systematically repressed by the Algerian military regime, and went underground as a result. After the elections were canceled and the FIS leaders had been arrested, a new organization, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA, Groupe Islamique Armé), emerged.

The GIA was a group made up of former militants who always rejected the idea of democratic participation in Algerian politics. Subsequently, it conducted a massive and deadly insurgency against the military regime. The deadly interactions between the GIA and the state resulted in massacres where thousands of civilians perished. The GIA experienced a split in 1998 in which a new faction, the *Salafist* Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), came into existence. More recently, the GSPC changed its name to Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb land (AQIM).

This newly vocalized association of the Algerian radical group to Al-Qaeda leads to some important questions: What are the origins of AQIM? Why did the GSPC transform itself from a national organization to a regional and global one, committed to the agenda of Al-Qaeda? What motivated this shift? How significant is the strategic re-orientation? Is this a change of strategy or a mere re-branding for the sake of reviving a dying terrorist group? What is the level of threat the AQIM poses to the United States and the Western world in general?

B. IMPORTANCE

Prior to 9/11, the United States viewed North Africa as a region of secondary importance, despite some threats such as Ahmed Ressam, an Algerian citizen whose 1999 plan to bomb the Los Angeles Airport failed.¹ Ressam was later identified as part of the Montréal Headquarters of the GIA terrorist cell. However, the U.S. policy makers did not realize the AQIM threat until after the *New York Times* interviewed the AQIM leader, who declared that the foreigners' interests (mainly U.S.) were under threat because they were supporting the Algerian regime. Thus, after the publication of the AQIM leader interview by the *New York Times* in July 2008,² Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates expressed that the merger of Al-Qaeda with the Algeria organization and others like it brought fresh risks.

European leaders also considered themselves under threat due to the presence of the important Algerian communities in their respective countries. The European counterterrorism coordinator Gilles de Kerchove noted that Europe faces a real threat,³ and Guidere Mathieu mentioned that Al-Qaeda has brought terrorism to the doors of Europe.⁴

According to the U.S. and other Western countries, focusing on the Maghreb makes strategic sense for Al-Qaeda because the region has a long history of militant Islamism and of people struggling against neocolonialism and “apostate” rulers. Moreover, there is a geographic proximity to Europe, and many North Africans have close liaisons to Europe and North America via their friends and families residing in large North African communities in France, Holland, Italy and Canada. That proximity makes the region a great springboard, not only for operatives looking to carry out strikes in Europe or in North America, but also to unify and radicalize the large North African

¹ Ely Karmon, *Coalitions between Terrorist Organizations: Revolutionaries, Nationalists and Islamists* (Leiden, Netherlands: Martnus Nijhoff, 2005), 338.

² An Interview with Abdelmalek Droukdal in the *New York Times* on July 2008.

³ Karmon, *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organizations*, 338.

⁴ Mathieu Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb, le Terrorisme aux Portes de l'Europe*, (Monaco: Rocher, 2007).

or in North America, but also to unify and radicalize the large North African communities on the continent. These communities can act either as support networks or as camouflage for radical operatives.

Given these risks, it is vitally important to understand the origins of the AQIM and to assess its potential to grow and threaten the U.S., regional allies and the European Union.

C. LITERATURE REVIEW

Experts on AQIM disagree as to what motivated the GSPC to merge with Al-Qaeda. Some argue that this is a genuine merger based on ideological affinity. Others argue that this is a mere re-branding of a failed organization, but it is still one that is focused on Algeria. According to Karmon, the coalition between radical organizations such as Al-Qaeda and GSPC could be “ideological, material and operational cooperation.”⁵ He defined the cited possible links as follows:

- Ideological cooperation involves the affirmation of a specific worldview or identity through the publication of documentations and leaflets that declare similar beliefs and operational goals.
- Logistical cooperation is expressed through the provision of resources such as financial assistance, weapons and ammunition, printing presses, forged documents, and operation manuals.
- Operational cooperation manifests in many forms, including the provision of military training in the organization’s camps; sharing tactical information, safe houses, and escape routes; conducting attacks (solely or jointly) against targets; and seeking the release of jailed members of the other organization.

The core debate on the coalition of GSPC and Al-Qaeda is between those who argue that the motivation behind the formation of AQIM is related to a local struggle between Algerian Islamists and their state, versus those who see it as a global or

⁵ Karmon, *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organizations*, 7.

transnational threat relating to the globalization of terrorism and the ideological appeal of the Al-Qaeda organization led by Usama bin Laden.⁶

According to Anneli Botha's argument, the GSPC in Algeria aligned itself officially with Al-Qaeda during 2007. In this case, one might argue that this group realized that the initial strategy of changing the political system and replacing it with a true Islamic government could not be realized. In order to justify their existence, it had to adapt to a transnational philosophy and agenda. She also explained that "Ayman Al-Zawahiri," believed to be second in command of Al-Qaeda, said on 3 November 2007,

Islamic nations of resistance and jihad (holy war) in the Maghreb see how your children are uniting under the banner of Islam and jihad against the United States, France and Spain. Your children in fighting our enemies and cleansing our lands of their slaves Moamer Kadhafi, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Abdelaziz Bouteflika and King Mohammed VI.⁷

Anneli Botha argues that while AQIM is continuing with its domestic campaign, its focus also includes Western interests in the region. According to her, it remains doubtful that Al-Qaeda has any direct operational link with the AQIM in which all operations must first be sanctioned by the Al-Qaeda leadership. It probably has an ideological link without being expressly revealed.

According to Jebnoun, the North African area could be the second Afghanistan of Africa. The AQIM fighters have certainly joined Iraq's insurgency and have become highly skilled in urban operations. He mentioned also that the GSPC changed its name to be "the Al-Qaeda organization in the Islamic Maghreb" (AQIM) in 2006 and quickly demonstrated that it had a link with Al-Qaeda.

Further, Jebnoun argues that when the different attacks, which occurred in the Maghreb region are examined, no evidence confirms that the attacks were ordered and organized by the same organization, "These speculations do not withstand critical

⁶ Jonathan Schanzer, *Al-Qaida's Armies; Middle East Affiliate Groups & the Next Generation of Terror* (New York: the Washington Institute for Near East Policy), 156.

⁷ Anneli Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb: the Transnationalisation of Domestic Terrorism* (Pretoria, South Africa: Institute of Security Studies, 2008), 204.

analysis and empirical evidence, however. A number of factors nullify the hypothesis that the attacks were coordinated by the same organization.”⁸

Jebnoun’s conclusions appear to be based on his personal knowledge and open resources, and he was in doubt that AQIM was linked with Al-Qaeda.

According to Luis Martinez, the GSPC, then AQIM is considered close to Al-Qaeda in its orientation by its capability to use the networks in foreign countries for its logistical operations. In this case, the author did not clarify whether the networks mentioned in his statement belonged either to Al-Qaeda or to AQIM.

Hadjira, noted that about one year ago, Pakistani terrorists came to train in AQIM training camps and may have contributed to the production of biological agents.⁹ He added that the *Washington Times* mentioned an intercepted communication between AQIM leaders and AQ Central in Pakistan relating to this event.

In addition, the author noted that AQIM was “hired” by AQ central, mostly because of its extensive network in Europe that could allow a strike in Europe at some point. The leadership of AQIM has been under intense pressure to attack European targets in order to maintain the group’s credibility. In fact, by not using a “conventional” weapon, AQIM would prove its value to AQ Central. If the group was indeed developing a biological weapon, it was probably destined for delivery in Europe and most likely in France.

According to Andrew Black, all the information related to the different operations carried out by AQIM between March 2005 and March 2008 was based on what was published in different open sources. He argued that targeting of the international assets in Algeria, Tunisia and Mauritania had increased since September 2007, the same month in which Al-Qaeda’s deputy leader called for expelling Western influence from the Maghreb.¹⁰ He refers the attack on the UN building in Algiers in December 2007, and

⁸ Jebnoun, “Is the Maghreb the Next Afghanistan?: Mapping the Radicalization of the Algerian Salafi Jihadist Movement” Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (2007): 1–36.

⁹ Olivier Guitta, “Al- Qaeda and the Plague” in *Middle East Times* on Tuesday, January 27, 2009.

¹⁰ Andrew Black, “AQIM’s Expanding Internationalist Agenda,” *Combating Terrorism Center* 1, no. 5 (April 2008): 12–14.

then the February kidnapping of two Austrian tourists in the south of Tunisia to demonstrate the escalating emphasis on international targets. The author added that while AQIM continues to maintain a strong commitment for targeting the Algerian government's representatives and its security forces, it (AQIM) has a growing ambition for targeting international assets in order to be in accordance with Al-Qaeda's central strategy of frightening and threatening the far enemy.¹¹

Daniel Lav argued¹² that before joining Al-Qaeda, the GSPC had developed extensive ties with other North African jihad groups, especially in Morocco, "Other recent developments include the trial of the Moroccan group *Jama'at Al-Tawhid W'AL – Jihad*, which is believed to have ties to the GSPC."¹³ He added that the Moroccan group was perceived to be capable of manufacturing a remote-controlled bomb detonated by cellular phone.

In September 2006, Al-Qaeda officially announced that the GSPC had adjoined its network. After the GSPC changed its name to Al-Qaeda organization in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in January 2007, the AQIM demonstrated similar global *Jihadi* tactics as used by Al-Qaeda. The AQIM carried out many synchronized suicide bombings against the Algerian security and military forces.

These operations were followed up with video statements on radical Web sites to display their operational capacity to the entire world. In addition to its bloody operations against the Algerian targets, AQIM attacked foreigners' assets in Algeria, such as an attack against U.S. oil conglomerate Halliburton in a western suburb of Algiers. Besides the attacks that occurred inside Algeria, another clash took place in Tunisia between the security forces and a Tunisian group led by an Afghanistan veteran and a former policeman in January 2007. On April 8, 2007, a group of nine Algerian soldiers died

¹¹ Black, "AQIM's Expanding Internationalist Agenda," 13.

¹² Daniel Lav, "The Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb: The Evolving Terrorist Presence in North Africa," The Middle East Media Research Institute no. 332 (March 7, 2007), <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=ia&ID=IA33207> (accessed January 27, 2009).

¹³ Ibid.

during an ambush of a military patrol. After three days, AQIM carried out a bloody operation that killed 33 persons and wounded more than 200.

On the other side of Algeria, a terrorist strike was carried out in Casablanca (Morocco) and killed three persons. After all these operations, the AQIM leader (Abou Moussab Abdel Wadoud) in an interview with the *New York Times* in July 2008 confirmed that an association with Al-Qaeda Central was already realized, and his organization's objectives were to attack within the region and globally follow the Al-Qaeda's strategy of targeting the "far enemy."¹⁴

The AQIM leader's interview with *New York Times*, following the different attacks carried out, started a debate between those seeing that AQIM was a regional threat and the others who tried to convince themselves and their readers that the AQIM goal was global.

The author's analyses were based essentially on open resources especially local media under the government control. It is likely that the media minimized the data and did not let the readers evaluate the threat objectively. Therefore, the above arguments and counter arguments are based on speculation, since there is no evidence supporting their ideas.

The goal in this thesis is to analyze the different data that motivated the GSPC to shift its name to AQIM. After that motivation has been determined, the existence or not of any ideological, operational or logistical link between AQIM and the different radical groups within the Maghreb then between AQIM and Al-Qaeda can be evaluated and confirmed, or discounted.

D. HYPOTHESES AND PROBLEMS

This study explores the emergence of AQIM through the prism of Karmon's three-fold division of ideological, operational, and material cooperation.¹⁵

¹⁴ Black, "AQIM's Expanding Internationalist Agenda," 12–14.

¹⁵ Karmon, *Coalitions Between Terrorist Organizations*.

Hypothesis 1: AQIM is only an ideological merger between GSPC and Al-Qaeda expressed by the publication of documentations and leaflets, a declaration of identical ideological and operational goals, but not an operational and logistical support because the GSPC has its preexisting networks, cadres, and leaders, and is focused on its fight with the Algerian state. It still operates locally and regionally, not globally, and most of its targets remain in North Africa.

Hypothesis 2: AQIM is a major threat to the United States and its European allies because its merger with Al-Qaeda is ideological, operational, and material. This merger constitutes a major transformation of a local extremist group into a transnational one with a new identity, objective, and target set.

Hypothesis 3: AQIM is not a major threat to the United States and its European allies because its merger with Al-Qaeda is a mere rebranding of a local extremist organization driven by the need to bolster its failing struggle against powerful Algerian states. This merger does not reflect an actual desire by Algerian Islamists to transform themselves from local insurgents into global jihadists.

What facts are there for each of these hypotheses? What is the required evidence necessary to substantiate or disconfirm each of these hypotheses?

The Algerian issue emerged before the 1990s, when the Algerian government, under the former president Chadli Ben Jedid, allowed the FIS (Front Islamic du Salut) to become a political party. After its clear success in local and legislative elections, it was then banned and repressed by the military power. After those election results were cancelled and the group (FIS) was repressed, it went underground and became violent. The group structure and leadership have changed many times to reflect its militancy and its challenge to the governmental desire to suppress this terrorist group. The GIA emerged out of this group as the army wing, while some other FIS followers tried to seek a peaceful political process. The GIA was accused of civilian massacres that occurred in Algeria. Several complaints accused the government of being behind the massacres and then blaming the GIA in order to tarnish and undermine its image. The government also faced an increasingly disapproving international opinion that accused it of human rights

violations. To avoid any kind of the Algerian government accusations, the majority of the GIA members formed a new group and named it GSPC declaring that it was targeting only the Algerian government's representatives and its security forces. The GSPC members were reduced as a result of the Algerian government's continuous repression.

The group (GSPC) started to look for external regional support perceiving a better chance for survival if the GSPC aligned with Al-Qaeda central's leadership and shifted its name to the Al-Qaeda organization in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). The name change and the declaration of a coalition with Al-Qaeda led many observers to inquire about the motivations behind this strategy.

The available academic studies seem not to cover the whole issue regarding the interaction between the GSPC and the Algerian government. The literature appears not well linked with the reality of the actual situation because of the absence of security and the secrecy of the GSPC. This makes it difficult to conduct relevant research on this group's activities and ambitions.

In addition, many of the available academic articles have been based on diplomatic interviews with interested leaders. The leader of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb AQIM, Abdelmalek Droukdal, was interviewed by *The New York Times*. During this interview, the AQIM leader threatened the West's interests, especially the French and U.S. interests in Algeria, the Maghreb countries, and then in the entire region:

If the U.S. administration sees that its war against the Muslims is legitimate, then what makes us believe that our war on its territories is not legitimate? Everyone must know that we will not hesitate in targeting it whenever we can and wherever it is on this planet. We say to the American people who are driven to more catastrophes by the Bush administration: If you are truly looking for your security and safety then listens carefully to the speeches of our sheik and emir, Osama bin Laden.¹⁶

¹⁶ Souad Mekhennet, Michael Moss, Eric Schmitt, Elaine Sciolino and Margot Williams, "Ragtag Insurgency Gains a Lifeline from Al Qaeda," *The New York Times*, July 1, 2008. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/01/world/africa/01algeria.html?_r=2&ref=africa, (accessed January 27, 2009).

Research should cover the entire region in order to provide credible information related to the local situation and its dynamics. Based upon such comprehensive information, a better understanding of all the different actors in the region, such as the radical groups and their respective governments, will be more objective. Currently, only superficial information is available to try to analyze the situation in Algeria with AQIM, in Morocco with GICM, in Tunisia with MTI and in Libya with LIFG. It is beneficial for analysis to conduct field surveys to better understand the situation. This author argues that this type of research requires someone who has been closer to the radical group's area or who knows as much as possible about the current events in the region, in order to come up with relevant information and understanding of the nuances of communication in the culture and languages of the region. This is missing in the field now.

E. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

This thesis is a qualitative study of the genealogy of AQIM beginning with the rise of the FIS and GIA to the emergence of the GSPC and AQIM. It seeks to trace the process by which radical Islamism has evolved and its linkages to external *Jihadism*. At each step, it seeks to determine what motivated the change in strategy and organizational structure to determine if AQIM's current trajectory is in line with its predecessors or is a complete departure from the groups that came before it.

The research will focus on Algeria where the main radical group in North Africa has been active. The research will also analyze the radical presence, evolution and activities from a time period just prior to Algerian independence up to the present with special focus on the main period of interaction between the radical group and the Algerian regime from 1992 to the present.

Through this research, the author will examine, analyze, then propose what could be the main or real link between Al-Qaeda central under "Ben Laden" and AQIM under its leader Abdelmalek Droukdal.

Secondly, this thesis will examine the link between the previous Algerian radical group, the *Salafist* Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), and the other groups in North Africa and the sub Sahara region, such as the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group

MICG (as known by its French acronym GICM: Groupe Islamique Combatant au Maroc), the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group LIFG .

This analysis will determine the nature of the link between the cited groups: Is the association based on ideology, logistics or operational links?

By this research, the author will clarify the different data issued or published concerning the global threat of AQIM, mainly the operations carried out in North Africa and Europe in 2007. This study will then define the AQIM's threat level. Various available data such as articles, books, Web sites, and interviews will be examined and analyzed, and cross-reference procedures will be followed.

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II. HISTORY OF ALGERIAN ISLAMISM

A. HISTORY OF ALGERIAN ISLAMISM BETWEEN 1962 AND 1988

During periods of struggle for their independence, several nationalist and religious parties in the Arab world faced many contradictions and divergences of tactics, yet this was not the case for the Algerians during their revolution against the French occupation. The Algerians were led by the National Liberation Front (NLF), well known by its French abbreviation FLN (Front de Liberation Nationale). The FLN emanated from a popular nationalistic movement that mobilized nearly all the tendencies, including the religious activist movement or *Salafism*, under a common banner of fraternity that previously did not have any equivalent in Algeria.

To better understand the Algerian *Salafist* movement, it is important to analyze its socio-historical element. *Salafism* is not a new movement in Algeria. Its roots go back to 1931 when Sheikh “Abdelhamid ibn Badis,” an influential Algerian Islamic scholar, founded the association of `Ulama (*jam`iyyat al-`ulama al-muslimin al-jaaza'iriyyin*) to mobilize his countrymen against the French occupation. The goal was to preserve Algerians’ identity, which he perceived was threatened by the so-called French “*mission civilisatrice*,”¹⁷ that sought to transfer Algerian traditional Islamic society into a European society very similar to the French society.¹⁸

After its independence in 1962, the Algerian constitution declared Islam the religion of the state, and stipulated that the head of state must be a Moslem. These principles were reaffirmed in the constitution of 1977.¹⁹ The association of Moslem Algerians *Ulama*’s (AOMA: Olamas) veterans were involved in the ministry of religion

¹⁷ Jebnoun, “Is the Maghreb the Next Afghanistan?”

¹⁸ Ali Merad, *Le Réformisme Musulman en Algérie de 1925 à 1940* (Paris: Mouton, 1967), 398–399. As cited by John Ruedy (ed.), *Islamism and Secularism in North Africa* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 76.

¹⁹ “Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria: Turning the Page (Islamism in North Africa III),” International Crisis Group report no 29 (July 30, 2004), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=2884&l=1> (accessed November 3, 2009).

and notably in the high Islamic council in the country. They also had important roles to play in the educational system, but they did not have a visible presence or influence over either the domains of the media or Army. These were under the government's control.²⁰

During the presidency of Houari Boumedienne from 1965 up to 1978, the Islamic activists were not satisfied with the government's tendency to be socialistic instead of applying Islamic "Shari'a" law. Yet, Islamic activists did not resort to violence to exhibit their opinions until the 1980s.

During the Chadli Ben Jedid presidency (1979–1988), the first Islamic armed movement (named Black October movement)²¹ was formed by the Algerian Islamic Movement (Mouvement Islamique Algerien, MIA) ²² and led by Mustapha Bouali. This group (MIA) started their struggle against the Ben Jedid regime by stealing a number of rifles, weapons, and explosives from a military arms installation before leaving for the mountains. ²³

B. THE IMPACT OF THE AFGHANISTAN THEATER ON ALGERIAN SOCIETY (1979–1989)

In 1979, the young people of Algeria were galvanized by the successful Iranian revolution and were led to believe that they could achieve their own objective of establishing an Islamic state through revolution. In December 1979, the Afghanistan war against the Soviet invasion was underway.²⁴ This war against the Soviet Union galvanized the youth throughout the Muslim world.

Besides Saudi Arabia, many Arab countries, particularly Egypt and Algeria, encouraged their youth to take part in that war.²⁵ So, after receiving the clearance from

²⁰ Hugh Roberts, "North African Islamism in the Building Light of 9-11," London School of Economics, Development Research Centre, and Working Paper (1st series) no. 34, (October 2003): 23–24.

²¹ Jebnoun, "Is the Maghreb the Next Afghanistan?"

²² "Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria."

²³ Evan F. Kohlmann, "Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria: the GIA, the GSPC and Al-QAEDA," The NEFA Foundation, May 2007, <http://www.nefaffoundation.org-info@nefaffoundation> (accessed May 2009).

²⁴ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda A La Conquête Du Maghreb*.

²⁵ Ibid., 17.

their respective countries, several groups from the Middle East, North Africa, and especially from Algeria embarked for their destination in Pakistan. The greatest numbers of North African Mujahidin were Algerians. “At the end of 1980, between 3,000 and 4,000 Algerians went through training camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan.”²⁶ By end of the Afghani’s war, the Algerian government suspected that about 1,500 fighters returned to Algeria.²⁷ Many of them entered the country illegally, perhaps to keep themselves under the security forces’ radar. These Algerian Afghans found themselves jobless and disenfranchised; in addition, they had become so influenced by their journey in Afghanistan that they continued to wear the Afghani’s uniform.²⁸

During this period in Algeria, the Algerian Islamist movements appeared as several variants, among them the *Salafist* tradition and the Muslim Brothers.²⁹ The Algerian regime believed that none of the mentioned groups presented a real threat or could challenge the regime party (FLN). A new group formed; the “Islamic Salvation Front,” known in French as FIS (Front Islamique de Salut), was made up of members related to the *Salafiya*, several of whom took part in the Afghani’s war.

C. THE RISE OF THE FIS (ISLAMIC SALVATION FRONT) AS A POLITICAL PARTY

By the end of the 1980s, the Algerian state was facing a recession and a weak labor market that could not respond to the Algerian youths’ ambitions.³⁰ In addition, the Algerian regime was not promoting any of the values leading to a collective identity, unlike during its predecessor under Boumédiène.³¹ Therefore, in order to overcome a probable crisis and a growing frustration, especially after the rise of a powerful Islamist movement, the administration of the President Chadli Ben Jedid decided to open up the

²⁶ Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*.

²⁷ Ibid., 32.

²⁸ Camille Al-Tawil, *Elharaka Elslamiya Elmoussallaha in Algeria: Mina Alinkadh Ila Aljamaa* (Beirut Lebanon: Dar Ennahar Publishing, 1998).

²⁹ “Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria.”

³⁰ Jebnoun, “Is the Maghreb the Next Afghanistan?”

³¹ Merad, *Le Réformisme Musulman*, 76.

political system after being restricted to the unique party NLF: National Liberation Front.³² Consequently, the integration of several Islamist movements was allowed into the political process, which led to the official rise of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS).³³ The FIS was legalized as a party in September 1989.³⁴

The FIS won the first communal and regional elections since Algeria's independence in 1962.³⁵ In addition, the FIS also won 188 seats in the first round of the legislative elections held on December 26, 1991, while the governing party (NLF) won only 18 seats.³⁶ The first results reflected clearly that the FIS would win massively in the National Assembly, if the second round took place as scheduled on January 16, 1992. Yet, instead keeping the elections as scheduled, the Algerian army forced the president to resign and took the power over the state on January 11, 1992.

It seemed that Army's high-ranking officers cancelled the elections in order to prevent the possible FIS victory, which could change the regime.³⁷ In addition to the cancellation of the elections, the Army dissolved the FIS and banned the use of mosques by any political parties. Facing that situation, the FIS called for a general strike, which was considered by the Algerian regime as a show of force. That situation provoked violent clashes with the police forces killing dozens.³⁸ A state of emergency was declared by the Algerian regime.³⁹

The FIS followers were divided in two factions.⁴⁰ The first faction, considered moderate and led by Abbassi Madani, continued to call for a political and peaceful solution for the crisis. It later formed its army wing, the Islamic Salvation Army known

³² Jebnoun, "Is the Maghreb the Next Afghanistan?"

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Al-Tawil, *Elharaka Elslamiya Elmoussallaha in Algeria*.

³⁵ Ibid, 24.

³⁶ Botha, "Terrorism in the Maghreb," 29.

³⁷ Jebnoun, "Is the Maghreb the Next Afghanistan?"

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ "Islamism, Violence and Reform in Algeria."

⁴⁰ Al-Tawil, *Elharaka Elslamiya Elmoussallaha in Algeria*.

by its French acronym “AIS” (Armee Islamique Du Salut) just for self-protection. The second faction formed the Armed Islamic Group “GIA” (as known by its French acronym, Groupe Islamique Armee) and refused any peaceful solution proposed. This later faction called all its followers for the *Jihad* against the regime and claimed its rights by the use of all available means, including violence. Violence increased rapidly, and this discord became the essence of the Algeria civil war.⁴¹

⁴¹ Al-Tawil, *Elharaka Elslamiya Elmoussallaha in Algeria*.

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III. THE RISE OF THE ALGERIAN RADICAL GROUPS

A. THE RISE OF THE ARMED ISLAMIC GROUP (GIA)

According to Abu Hamza Al-Masri, the Arab-Afghan's spokesman in Great Britain was formed from a collection of militant groups that had struggled against the military government of Algeria.⁴² In June 1993, the GIA leader "Abdelhak Layada" was arrested in Morocco by Moroccan police and delivered to the Algerian regime. On May 13, 1994, Abdelhak Layada was replaced by Cherif Gousmi (a.k.a. Abou Abdallah Ahmed), who was committed to continuing their *Jihad* against the Algerian regime until they overthrew it.⁴³

According to General Touati of the Algerian Army, there were approximately 27,000 Islamist fighters in 1993. They enjoyed strong popular support and in 1994, were considered capable of overthrowing the regime.⁴⁴

Besides the society's support of the fighters, the Algerian regime realized also that an Al-Qaeda center was providing weapons and military equipment to the GIA in recognition of the Afghan veterans who still had strong links with Osama Ben Laden, Al-Qaeda's leader. This contribution by Al-Qaeda was characterized as "a genuine network supplying arms and military equipment to the Algerian guerillas."⁴⁵

Following its specific *Jihad* (struggle) or commitment already designated during their May 13, 1994, meeting, the GIA adopted many interpretations of Islamic Laws according to its own criteria and started to kill anyone who criticized the GIA organization or did not support its fighters. By 1995, the GIA had kidnapped diplomats, such as the Yemeni and Omani ambassadors in Algiers, Mr. Kaassem Askar Jabran and Sheikh Helal bin Salem Essiyabi respectively, who were released after about two

⁴² Kohlmann, "Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria."

⁴³ Al-Tawil, *Elharaka Elslamiya Elmoussallaha in Algeria*.

⁴⁴ Luis Martinez. "Why the Violence in Algeria?" *The Journal of North African Studies* 9, no. 2 (2004): 14–27.

⁴⁵ Kohlmann, "Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria."

weeks.⁴⁶ In addition to its kidnapping acts, the GIA was responsible for the deaths of two hundred schoolteachers and directors accused of supporting the regime by joining the national educational institutions to teach youth or by opening schools to allow the youth learn the French culture instead of joining the GIA to overthrow “*Hizb Franca*” (France Party).⁴⁷

In addition to the educational institutions, the religious representatives of Muslims and Christians were also threatened and killed by the GIA. The other GIA targets were the journalists threatened under the *Fatwa* (interpretation), “who fights us by pen we will fight him by the sword.”⁴⁸ The GIA killed many women who did not wear the *Hijab* (Head cover), as well as entire families associated with the government, the security or the military.⁴⁹

In addition to its indiscriminate killing of local targets, the GIA believed that the regime was receiving foreigner support, especially from France, the USA and Russia. The GIA issued the following communiqué deemed as necessary to purify Algeria through hunting down all foreigners living or working there.” The GIA has fought all Unbelievers of all ethnicities and groups and ordered every Unbeliever to leave these lands (Algeria) ...Some have heeded the warning, and others refused, so GIA killed several of them, singles and in groups...”⁵⁰

The GIA campaign against the foreigners resulted in the assassination of more than 90 innocent civilians, most of them French, and many others families were forced to leave Algeria.

The organization targeted the multinational petroleum or gas companies which were considered (by the GIA) as the Algerian regime supporters. Accordingly, the GIA leader Djamel Zitouni wrote and issued the following communiqué entitled “Voiding Excuses and Confusion of All Oil Employees”:

⁴⁶ Al-Tawil, *Elharaka Elslamiya Elmoussallaha in Algeria*.

⁴⁷ Jebnoun, “Is the Maghreb the Next Afghanistan?”

⁴⁸ Al-Tawil, *Elharaka Elslamiya Elmoussallaha in Algeria*.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Kohlmann, “Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria.”

It is well known that the oil resources of this land are the largest source of revenue for the apostates which they use to fight *Mujahedeen* and to finance their operationsGIA orders all employees of the oil companies to stop work... and those who abide by the order, then he served himself, and those who refuse to stop work, then they have intended to fight, and have transgressed against themselves, and they will be killed.⁵¹

After issuing the above communiqué, the GIA carried out operations against the American oil company “Brown & Root-Condor” in Bouchaoui, on the road between Algiers and Zeralda. This operation consisted of attacking a bus carrying U.S. and Algerian workers.⁵² After targeting U.S. workers in the attack, the GIA also killed or injured Russians and Ukrainians working in the oil domain with the Russian oil company Stroytransgaz.⁵³

In addition to its terrible actions in Algeria, the GIA continued to threaten the Western countries, especially France. The GIA cell known as the “Signatories with Blood”⁵⁴ hijacked an Air France jetliner from the Algiers airport with 171 passengers and headed to Paris. However, after convincing the hijackers to get more fuel, the aircraft landed at Marseille airport where the French special forces intervened by killing the hijackers and releasing the passengers. The GIA objective in hijacking the jet was to claim the release some of their militants or sympathizers such as Sheikh Omar Abdurrahman (a.k.a the blind sheikh), arrested in the USA after being accused of targeting New York landmarks including the World Trade Center.⁵⁵ After its failed hijacking operation, the GIA kidnapped and then killed four priests (three French and one Belgian) as the first act of revenge. A second revenge-based counter attack against France took place in 1995 with several explosives operations in Paris in which many persons were killed or wounded. ⁵⁶ Furthermore, while Zitouni, as the GIA leader, continued to admire his counter-attacking efforts in France, his members also kidnapped

⁵¹ Kohlmann, “Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria.”

⁵² Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*.

⁵³ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁴ Mathieu, Guidere, “La Tentation Internationale D’Al-Qaeda au Maghreb,” Focus Strategique: IFRI Center des Etudes de Securite, no.12 (December 2008).

⁵⁵ Al-Tawil, *Elharaka Elslamiya Elmoussallaha in Algeria*.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

seven French monks residing in the Medea region of Algeria and demanded the release of the GIA's previous leader; Abdel Haq was still jailed by the Algerian regime. But after the French government refused any negotiation with the GIA, the monks were killed without any mercy.

After these operations against both locals and foreigners, many of the GIA's militants or supporters decided to pull out and denounced the GIA attitude. In retaliation, the GIA leader started to kill his former members and their families, such as the Libyan Group for Combat leader (Abou Sakhar Al-liby), and Essaid and Rajjam from another Algerian group named *Al-Jazara*. The killings were undertaken because the victims refused the GIA leader's ferocity. But from the GIA's perspective, the victims were accused of drifting from the right path, and the leader ordered his fighters to counter any call for reconciliation with the Algerian regime, "Mujahedeen never felt a day of truce with those apostates who sold out their religion and waged war (on Islam) with everything at their hands... it is the cry of No Truce, No Reconciliation and No Dialogue..."⁵⁷

After Zitouni was killed by some of his former followers, Antar Zouabri took over and instead of correcting the previous mistakes by the group, he declared that his group was supported only by its local population, and he added that the GIA never needed any external support.⁵⁸ He carried out many shameful massacres in several isolated, poor rural villages where hundreds of innocent civilians were killed, including the elderly, children and women. Indeed, these massacres affected the entire group's local and foreigners' supporters, and caused the entire world, especially the Muslim world, to distance itself from the GIA while condemning all of its massacres. Abu Hamza Al-Masri (the Arab-Afghan's spokesman in the United Kingdom) commented, "No one at the time believed that this could be the work of any Islamic group, even the anti-Muslims themselves, they have all agreed that this is the work of the Algerian government, trying to put people off from Islam and Islamic ideas."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Kohlmann, "Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria."

⁵⁸ Al-Tawil, *Elharaka Elslamiya Elmoussallaha in Algeria*.

⁵⁹ Kohlmann, "Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria."

By 1997, Zouabri crossed the red line by describing all the Algerian population as apostates and hypocrites for not supporting the GIA Jihad against the Algeria regime's repression, and he accepted responsibility for committing all the bloody operations.⁶⁰ Consequently, the GIA lost his local and external support after demonstrating extreme *Takfiri* tendencies and being responsible for massacring innocent people.

The GIA's previous external support was based on the propaganda distributed by the publication *Al-Ansar*, issued in Great Britain by Abou Mousaab Essouri (Omar Abderrahman).⁶¹ This publication was important for obtaining funding. Besides the propaganda publication, the Libyan Islamic Fighting group (LIFG), following the killing of their leader "Sakhar Al-libi" by the GIA previous leader Zitouni, announced that it also was halting its alliance and stated that, "After Djamel Zitouni became the leader of the group, there was a noticeable change within the group who allowed for itself to kill anyone who was not in line with it."⁶² Eventually, the struggle appeared to be a battle between the movement and the Muslims of Algeria.

As a consequence, the number of GIA supporters decreased rapidly, and the group was affected by the departure and the division of its followers, some of whom formed the GSPC (Salafist Group for Prayer and Combat) in 1998, which was perceived to be a wiser and an objective group because it conducted only selective operations against the Algerian government and security forces members. Yet the GIA residue continued their bloody actions under their leader Zouabri until he was killed close to the Abou Farik region in February 2002, by the Algerian security forces.⁶³ According to General Larbi Belkhir, the 1990s was a "black decade or a decade wracked by violence, with a death toll reaching approximately 150,000."⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Kohlmann, "Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria."

⁶¹ Lia Brynjar, *Architect of Global Jihad: The Life of Al-Qaeda Strategist Abu Mus'ab al-Suri* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

⁶² Kohlmann, "Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria."

⁶³ Al-Tawil, *Elharaka Elslamiya Elmoussallaha in Algeria*.

⁶⁴ Martinez, "Why the Violence in Algeria?" 14–27.

B. THE RISE OF GSPC (SALAFIST GROUP FOR PRAYER AND COMBAT) OR (AL-JAMAAH AL-SALAFIYYAH LI-AL-DAWAAH WAL QITAL)

After the GIA collapsed, all the members who had opposed the Antar Zouabri leadership gathered in a group and aimed to restore the society's support. This goal was encouraged by the majority of the Algerian *Mujahedeen* factions, as reported by the Arab-Afghans who were alarmed by the Jihad collapse in Algeria under the GIA leaders. At that time, it was reported that Ben Laden used his satellite phone to contact the GSPC leader Abdelmajid Dishu (a.k.a Abu Muab) from Afghanistan and urged him to reestablish a better image of *jihad* in Algeria and the rise of the GSPC name in the Muslim world where the name of the GIA was tarnished.⁶⁵

It was reported in March 1999, the GSPC was officially established as a military organization in order to continue the struggle against the Algerian apostate regime and its supporters by following the *Salafist* creed and ideology while denouncing all massacres committed by the GIA,” The GSPC is a military organization, following the *Salafist* creed and ideology, fighting in *jihad* against the Algerian regime ...to implement *Shari'a* and remove the oppression and humiliation from the shoulders of our oppressed brothers.”⁶⁶

It was noted that the GSPC expressed that its ambitions would not be limited to its local interest but would be extended to other places which could be reached by its fighters. The GSPC leader, Hassan Hattab, successfully managed to demonstrate his new philosophy as different from the preceding radical group leaders,(Zitouni and Zourabi, but he did not achieve any remarkable results in the field. The GSPC fighters perceived that their operations against the apostate regime were weak and limited probably due to the lack of national and international support, especially after the 9/11 attacks in the U.S.

Many analysts realized prior to 9/11, that the Algerian Army, having taken advantage of the GSPC weakness, had ‘neutralized’ the threat represented by the radical group. At that point, the international community still had not recognized the legitimacy

⁶⁵ Kohlmann, “Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria.”

⁶⁶ Ibid.

of the Army's indiscriminate actions against the radical group's relatives and sympathizers.⁶⁷ Some analysts speculated that the 9/11 attacks would legitimize the Algerian army's repression [a.k.a. the "dirty war"].⁶⁸ Thus, when the global war on terrorism was launched by the President George W. Bush, the Algerian strategy against the radical groups was intensified and gave the Algerian security forces the legitimacy to act without constraint, considering themselves the vanguard against *Jihad* and sharing in the world effort to face the Terrorism threat.

September 12, 2001, the Algerian president Abdelaziz Bouteflika expressed his condolences to U.S. president George W. Bush and conveyed indirectly the main reasons for letting his government face the radical groups:

I reaffirmed to President Bush the sympathy and the full solidarity of the Algerian people with the American people in these moments of gravest trial. Algeria understands perhaps better than others the pain of the families of the September 11 victims. For these reasons, Algeria supports the initiative of launching an international action against terrorism.⁶⁹

The U.S. military assistance to Algeria increased dramatically after 9/11 as a partner in the GWOT. Algeria has enjoyed 18 times the total amount of military assistance the country received over the previous 12 years.⁷⁰

By 2003, the GSPC leader (Hattab) appeared too weak to face the counter attack of the Algerian forces in the field. Guidere argued that besides the lack of support, Hattab faced the departure without his approval of many of his fighter to join Zarkaoui in Iraq.⁷¹ Algerians joining the Iraq insurgency was seen by Hattab as against the GSPC objective of prioritizing the fight against the Algerian regime, "the Near Enemy," instead attacking "the Far Enemy."⁷²

⁶⁷ Martinez, "Why the Violence in Algeria?"

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Jebnoun, "Is the Maghreb the Next Afghanistan?"

⁷¹ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

⁷² Gerges A. Fawaz, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

After failing to convince his followers to join Iraq's front, Hattab resigned, and then he surrendered to the Algerian security forces (or the oppressors as defined by the succeeding GSPC leader, Nabil Sahraoui).⁷³ Thus, Nabil Sahrawi (a.k.a Abu Ibrahim Mustapha) took over the GSPC and was committed to being more productive than his predecessor. He issued his main vision related to the *Jihad* in Algeria:

Here, we have evil America declaring a crusade and preparing the troops of the infidels to attack Islam everywhere. President Bush and many high officials clearly and loudly declared that this is a religious war under the banner of the cross. The goal of this war, which they called a 'war on terrorism' and 'war against evil' and other names, is to keep Islam and the Muslims from establishing the Country of Islam that would rule people with the book of Allah and His prophet.⁷⁴

In June 2004, Nabil Sahrawi was killed during clashes with the Algerian army, and Abdelmalik Dourkdal (a.k.a Abu Musab Abdelwadoud). In order to revive the recruiting efforts and the popular support lost after the dark period of the GIA, Dourkdal denied the Algerian government reports and those of some press agencies that announced the *Jihadists* movement had been undermined and wiped out by its internal divergences, conflicts between different main regional leaders, and the impact of the Algerian régime forces' arrests and killings. The GSPC leader defended his opinion by expressing, "war is a contest, one day it goes for you, and another day against you...We kill them as they kill us."⁷⁵ The GSPC leader started to revive the feeling that U.S. President George W. Bush had declared after 9/11 "a sweeping war on Terrorism" and openly labeled this effort as a "crusade."⁷⁶

To build his strategy based on the Bush declaration, Dourkadl elaborated that his objective was not just to defend himself or his group, but that all the Muslims were under

⁷³"An Interview with the Commander of the GSPC on Monday 22 Shaaban 1426 (September 26, 2005)," *Al-Jama'ah Magazine* 1, no. 5 (October 20, 2005), <http://www.alhesbah.org/v/showthreatphp?t=36423>. This reference is in Arabic. It was published in London on October 20, 2005 by the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group magazine (Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyyah al-Muqatilah bi-Libya): <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/fig.htm>.

⁷⁴ Kohlmann, "Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria."

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

threat not only by Bush, but also by their relative apostate regimes such as the Algerian, Egyptian, Pakistani and the Saudi regime, which, according to him, had sold out their own people's interests.⁷⁷

The number of Algerians who joined the insurgent volunteers, or Al-Qaeda in Iraq, reached about 1,200 fighters, according to a Saudi Arabian intelligence.⁷⁸ During this period, as previously mentioned, the GSPC attempted to overcome many difficulties dealing with the Algerian regime by asking for the external support. This situation was revealed when Mokhtar Bin Mokhtar (named El Para) was captured in Tchad with some other GSPC followers by the Tchady's Army, supported by a French unit operating in the area. The GSPC asked the Al-Qaeda in Iraq leader, Zarkaoui, to kidnap some French diplomats in Iraq in order to force the French Government to liberate Mokhtar bin Mokhtar. This call did not receive any positive feedback, and Mokhtar was transferred to Algeria Forces.⁷⁹ The second event that demonstrated the GSPC's attempt to approach Al-Qaeda was when Zarkaoui captured two Algerian Diplomats in Iraq. The GSPC asked to kill them because they were Algerian regime representatives, and they were supporting the invader (U.S.).⁸⁰ It was noted that the GSPC rushed to congratulate Al-Qaeda in Iraq for this "display of heroic jihad,"⁸¹ then celebrated the execution of the two Algerian diplomats for "the spilling of Muslims' blood in Algeria."⁸²

The GSPC leader said in a September 2005 interview:

O' young men of Islamic Maghreb... America is depositing its Marines in the grand desert and this is your chance to seek revenge for the events of Guantanamo, Abu Gharaib, Al-Aqsa [Jerusalem], and Al-Haramain [Saudi

⁷⁷ Kohlmann, "Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria."

⁷⁸ Nawaf Obaid, "Fractured Iraq: Implications for Saudi National Security," *Saudi-US Relations Information Service*, June 23, 2006, <http://www.saudi-us-relations.org/fact-book/documents/2006/061016-snsap-iraq-project-final-report.pdf>, (accessed November 4, 2009).

⁷⁹ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

⁸⁰ Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb: the Transnationalisation of Domestic Terrorism*, p12.

⁸¹ Jean-Pierre Filiu, "The Local and Global Jihad of Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghrib," *The Middle East Journal* 63, no 2 (Spring 2009).

⁸² Ibid

Arabia]... This is your chance to erase the colonial borders... that were established surrounding our Islamic countries and turning them into prisons ruled by various oppressors ...We (GSPC fighters) will be another brigade to join the brigades of holy jihad manifested by the holy attacks on New York and Washington under the leadership of Osama Ben Laden.⁸³

By this point, it had become a nearly unbroken routine for the GSPC to conclude their communiqués and propaganda videos by hailing as rightful leader of the global jihadist movement.

The GSPC leader announced that it was time to shift its group name from GSPC to Al-Qaeda in the land of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM),⁸⁴ which led this author to analyze the GSPC tactic before shifting its name to AQIM. During that period, the GSPC waged its campaign to enlist the youth as fighters and to get more supporters, mainly after the departure of many of its fighters to Iraq. They faced the reconciliation project proposed by the Algerian government to encourage the GSPC members to give up and surrender themselves to the security forces who realized that was productive. After that, it will be necessary to review the different steps taken by the GSPC prior to being aligned with Al-Qaeda.

C. THE RISE OF THE AL-QAEDA ORGANIZATION IN THE ISLAMIC MAGHREB (AQIM)

1. GSPC Status Prior to Aligning Itself with Al-Qaeda

Between September 1998 and September 2001, the GSPC was rocked by internal rivalries, defections in its ranks and by numerous dissensions. Its combatants were maneuvering in the Algerian scrub, isolated and weakened by the initiatives in favor of the civil concord program in 1999 that let more than 1,200 GSPC members be forgiven.

Several analysts pointed out that it was necessary to wait for the events of September 11, 2001, to see the new dynamics of a rebirth of the mind *Jihadist* and a

⁸³ “A Call to Battle from the Mujahideen of the GSPC to the Monotheists of the Islamic Maghreb.” The NEFA Foundation, September 5, 2005, <http://www.nefafoundation.org/miscellaneous/nefagspc0507.pdf>, (accessed November 4, 2009).

⁸⁴ Kohlmann, “Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria.”

unification of *Salafist* under the same banner. The master of this dynamic was the previous GSPC leader Hassan Hattab. He unified the majority of different groups that appeared well organized and active.

2. The Impact of September 11, 2001, on the GSPC

It was reported that in September 2001, fifteen days after 9/11, the Algerian media related slaughters in the Al-Arbi city where twenty-three persons were killed, and nine others wounded.⁸⁵ The GSPC were accused to have perpetrated this massacre. Nevertheless, in its communiqué of the October 1, 2001, the GSPC lingered to react or to deny being responsible for the massacres. The GSPC recalls in stride that it was always against the attacks of the civilians and the innocents, which was behind the GIA collapse. At the same time, the GSPC accused the Algerian security services of having perpetrated the slaughters while accusing the GSPC of committing them. The alleged purpose was to deprive the GSPC of its popular support. In his same communiqué, the GSPC chief pondered the timing of that massacre and other massacres that touched almost all the west of Algeria at the same period: “All Massacres only intervene some days after the attack of September 11 in America, as if our régime wanted to transmit a message that cursed Americans while telling to them: we are also the terrorism victims.”⁸⁶

The Algerian government used the national television to praise the victories of the Algerian army against terrorism; meanwhile, the GSPC continued attacking the Algerian Army and security forces. It was the beginning of a new era of the jihad according to the expression of the GSPC leader Hassan Hattab, who reminded his followers:

To mistrust the enemies of the inside and the outside who want us alienated with them, Christianized, Judases and to secularize under the pretexts of: globalization, global war on terrorism and the call for the peace.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Ali Bekhadem, “Al-Arbi Slaughters,” *El-Watan Algerian Newspaper*, September 25, 2001.

⁸⁶ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

⁸⁷ Camille Al-Tawil, *Al-Qaeda Wa Akhwatouha’: Kissatou Al-Jihadiyyine Al-Arab: Dar Asski*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dar Essaki, 2007).

In January 2003, the GSPC leader strongly attacked the Algerian régime for its support of the Americans in their invasion of Iraq and considered that as treason to Iraq's people.⁸⁸

3. The Impact of the War in Iraq on the GSPC

Several analysts concluded prior to the war on Iraq, that the GSPC Hassan Hattab leader increased his violent attacks against the Algerian government and that this violence was an attack against the Algerian government foreign policies. This action countered a debate taking place inside the GSPC concerning the strategy that should be adopted with Al-Qaeda in case there was an effective occupation of Iraq by the coalition forces.

It was pointed out that there were two main opinions within the GSPC group: ⁸⁹

The first side was the pan-Islamists who preferred the solidarity with the Iraqis in case of occupation. This side was led by the young chief within the GSPC, Abdelmalek Droukdal (alias Abou Moussab Abd Al-Wadoud).

The second side was the Islamo-nationalistic that only swore by Algeria and put the interest of the Algerians well above all other consideration. Their goal was to overthrow the apostate Algerian regime, and then build an Islamic state.

This second camp was led by the GSPC Hassen Hattab (alias Hamza), who defended his strategy even after the invasion of the Iraq in March 2003. He opted only for a passive support, which was defined as exchanges of ideas and advice.⁹⁰ The GSPC leader Hassen Hattab refused at that time to allow any of his followers to go fighting in Iraq. He considered that leaving Algeria to fight against the coalition in Iraq would lead to the end of the GSPC. It was pointed out also that the GSPC council requested in March 2003, that Hattab publish a communiqué of indignation and threaten the American policy,

⁸⁸ Al-Tawil, *Al-Qaeda Wa Akhawatouha*.

⁸⁹ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

⁹⁰ Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*.

but he refused saying, “The GSPC should not interfere in state affairs of Iraq and the Iraqis do not need an external support.”⁹¹

It was perceived that, despite the GSPC leader’s effort to convince his group members to keep focusing on the Algerian régime, the GSPC council voted, “Active support to the brothers Iraqis.”⁹² This position has even been taken by quite a lot of collaborators of GSPC. These collaborators estimated that the war in Algeria was potentially lost and that it was worth it to save honor by taking part in the jihad in Iraq.⁹³

However, Hattab Hassan emphasized that the charter of the GSPC was the official document to which the group’s chief had to refer, and clarified for his followers that their objectives were “to fight the Algerian renegade régime who was refusing the application of the Shari’a law...Algerian regime was doing worse than the American in Iraq.”⁹⁴

Yet, despite that major GSPC leader’s effort to stop his fighters from joining Iraq’s front, many of them left Algeria for Iraq as volunteers or were recruited by Al-Qaeda without previous GSPC leader authorization.⁹⁵

The free departure of the best GSPC fighters for Iraq was *the drips that made overflow the vase*.⁹⁶ Consequently, the situation made it very difficult for the field commanders to carry out operations. Facing that critical situation, the GSPC leader did not have a choice other than to resign. Abou Ibrahim Mustapha (alias Nabil Sahraoui) took over as head of the GSPC in August 2003.⁹⁷

As Guidere pointed out, the new GSPC leader (Nabil sahraoui) appeared unable to get along with his own ambition, which was limited to overthrowing the Algerian regime or to applying his new political idea to actively support Iraq’s insurgents, which

⁹¹ Al-Tawil, *Al-Qaeda Wa Akhwatouha*’.

⁹² Guidere, *Al-Qaeda A La Conquête Du Maghreb*.

⁹³ Al-Tawil, *Al-Qaeda Wa Akhwatouha*’.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*.

⁹⁶ Translated from the French expression “les gouttes qui ont débordé le vase” that means the red line was crossed.

⁹⁷ Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 2.

had already been adopted by the GSPS council. Guidere added also that, the GSPC leader's incapacity to execute his plan to support Iraqi's insurgents was due to the two following reasons:

First, he did not possess a proper, safe, and sure network that would allow him to organize the departure of the Algerian combatants to Iraq.

Second, he was convinced that the important objective was to fight the Algerian regime. He could not make such declarations countering the GSPC council decision to actively support Iraqi's insurgents because he avoided the GSPC split, then a definitive disappearance of Jihad.

In September 2003, the second anniversary of 9/11, the GSPC leader attempted approach with the Al-Qaeda message by publishing a communiqué in support of the 9/11 event. In its communiqué, the GSPC leader presented its apologies for failing to support Al-Qaeda then and expressed his admiration for Mullah Omar and for Ben Laden, "The Sheik Osama that god the protecting him - is account among the sincere Mujahidin of our time...he distinguishes himself by his support to the Islam and to the Muslims everywhere or they are."⁹⁸

Camille al-Tawil mentioned that in spite of the participation of several Algerian fighters in Iraq's insurgency, this later activity did not appear in the GSPC literature, probably due to the GSPC concentration on its operations inside Algeria. The first communiqué of the Algerian group commenting on what was happening in Iraq appeared February 7, 2004. In this communiqué, the GSPC leader reminded its fighters that, "It is needed to attack all those who supporting the war in Iraq, mainly the foreign enterprises of the unbelievers such as the Americans, the French, the British ..."⁹⁹

The GSPC leader commented in his communiqué that Iraq's front was a model to follow and the Iraqi fields qualified as Earth of *jihad* and martyrdom, "Happy the one

⁹⁸ Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*, 2.

⁹⁹ Al-Tawil, *Al-Qaeda Wa Akhwatouha*'.

who will die in martyr! Happy who will die while accomplishing the duty individual of the jihad...par Allah, all our deaths are to the paradise and the deaths of the infidels are in hell?”¹⁰⁰

It was clear in this later GSPC message that it was providing an incentive for any who joined the front to fight the Algerian security forces, and it could be seen also as a direct call for recruiting supporters, mainly among the youth.

4. The Failed Recruitment Campaign

The GSPC launched a campaign of propaganda to recruit among the university youth in 2005. The main GSPC campaign goal was to reinforce its ranks and replace its combatants. Many GSPC fighters had already gone to Iraq; others were killed by the Algerian security forces or gave up by surrendering themselves to the Algerian regime forces. During this campaign, several tracts had also been circulated in several Algerian universities praising the youth as “the backbone of the nation”¹⁰¹ and the key for victory.

The GSPC pursued its vibrant call to the youth who had the strength and the conscience to join the ranks of the Mujahedeen and to fight against the tyrants and the unbelieving régimes.¹⁰²

Indeed, in order to mobilize the Algerian youth masses during the year 2005, it was reported that the GSPC leader put the accent on several themes that had a certain impact on the targets. The first strongly emphasized theme was the family and the family’s code. The GSPC leader qualified them as copies of the French codes, “...estimating that it will soon be a copy of the French code exactly as it is already in the school programs.”¹⁰³

The second theme used was the one of work and the academic diplomas. The chief of the GSPC rejected their utility in the professional life and called the youth to look for the diploma of Allah (Allah chahada’a) rather than the diploma of the Al

¹⁰⁰ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda A La Conquête Du Maghreb*.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Al-Tawil, *Al-Qaeda Wa Akhwatouha*.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

University (Achahadaa'Al-Jaamiya), "it will not serve to anything, while the other diploma (the one of Allah) will open the doors of the paradise."¹⁰⁴

The third theme exploited by the GSPC leader was the nature of the Algerian society, "It concerned the misery of youth Algerian, under the responsibility of a corrupted Algerian government."¹⁰⁵

By all these propaganda messages, it was clear that social issues served the GSPC as a favorable topic for spreading its ideologies among the youth to recruit as many as it could.

In the last phase of the propaganda, the GSPC, on September 11, 2005, proposed a "diploma in the *Jihad* for whoever joined its ranks before the beginning of the academic year..."¹⁰⁶

Due to the rudimentary character of this propaganda and the effect of the GIA massacres on the Algerians, the GSPC influence had a limited impact on the youth, which resulted in it failing to recruit among youth. That situation then forced the GSPC to start its struggle against the Algerian regime reconciliation project, which gave any GSPC fighters the opportunity to give up and surrender themselves to the Algerian security forces.

5. The GSPC Facing the Algerian Regime Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation Project

That campaign took place some weeks before the holding of the referendum on the charter for the peace and the reconciliation promoted by the Algerian president (Abdelaziz Bouteflika). He had indicated his intent to provide for a general amnesty in connection with the reconciliation, and he asked all the Algerians for their approval

¹⁰⁴ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Tawil, *Al-Qaeda Wa Akhwatouha*'.

through a referendum.¹⁰⁷ For that reason, the GSPC led a big communicational offensive to convince the Algerians not to take part in the vote. It was reported that the GSPC was issuing a daily communiqué during the last week of September 2005. It was reported also that the GSPC was using all arguments to deter the voters.¹⁰⁸

The GSPC appeared disconnected from the Algerian population, but it continued distributing its messages as referring to the fourteen years of interaction with the régime since the cancelling of the 1990s elections, “Oh, Muslims! Fourteen years on Allah’s path? Were worth ... continuing in the same path to the eternal paradise.”¹⁰⁹

A gap existed between the popular aspirations and the GSPC policies, which were considered a Utopian project by proposing an impractical social agenda. On September 27, 2005, the GSPC leader published a long letter addressed to the Algerian people titled, “No peace without the Islam.”¹¹⁰ The GSPC leader reiterated his firm opposition to the charter for peace and reconciliation and argued that, “There were only the people of the truth (Al-Haqq) and the people of perdition (Ahl Al-Zalat)...The Mujahedeen of the GSPC are of course in correct path while all others are in the wrong way...”¹¹¹ But as Jebnoun was mentioned by Jebnoun, that beyond its argument typically *Salafist* and radically oriented, the chief of the GSPC presented a certain number of more concrete elements that justified, according to him, the further GSPC struggle in Algeria:

This Algerian regime allowed the installation of the U.S. military bases in the South of Algeria, It (Algerian regime) sold the oil wells and gas fields to multi-nationals... It worked with the former colonizers armies... it changed the code nationality...it canceled the chain of Islamic studies... But in all this, he did not consult the people even for once...¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ “‘Reconciliation’ as the Price of Truth and Justice?” *Algeria-Watch*, August 26, 2005, http://www.algeria-watch.org/en/aw/truth_justice.htm (accessed on September 15, 2009). Translation from German.

¹⁰⁸ “The GSPC Undermining the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation,” *Al-Khabar*, August 26, 2005.

¹⁰⁹ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹¹⁰ Al-Tawil, *Al-Qaeda Wa Akhwatouha*.

¹¹¹ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹¹² Jebnoun, “Is the Maghreb the Next Afghanistan?”

For the GSPC leader, the list of grievances was long because the referendum on peace and reconciliation served only the interests of its promoters and sought to whitewash the army of all his actions during the civil war, whether kidnapping, torture, or miserable camps in the desert ... etc.¹¹³ The GSPC leader's objective was to remind and convince the Algerian society to reject the Regime reconciliation project by displaying a comparison between the French army prior to the independence and the Algerian army grievances, "The French army had taken 6,000 people during the war of independence while the Algerian security services had vanished more than 20,000 people in the early years of *Jihad* and these people are still missing."¹¹⁴

The GSPC leader believed that there were sufficient reasons for the continuation of Jihad struggle in Algeria. But he added, in another communiqué, that in order to mobilize the mainstream of the Algerian society which claimed that unemployment undermined the regime:

...Where are the oil revenues? Why every time the oil price increases on the external market, the deviant life dearer in the domestic market? Why the unemployment is rises there at the same time? All these inconsistencies do not make it directly responsible the Algerian government.¹¹⁵

Politically, the GSPC leader considered that the Concorde project proposed by the Algerian regime in 1999 had no relationship to the draft of National Reconciliation in 2005 because the events of September 11, 2001, changed ideas locally and globally. The GSPC leader argued that the same events are not seen or treated in the same way prior or post 9/11, "Those who were merely Islamists before 9-11 became terrorists after."¹¹⁶

It was perceived by regional analysts that the GSPC leader tried to emphasize that the project of reconciliation was as one of aspects of the war against terrorism led by the U.S. administration and by Algeria itself.

¹¹³ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Jebnoun, "Is the Maghreb the Next Afghanistan?"

¹¹⁶ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

6. The GSPC Focused on the External Circumstances to Undermine the Algerian Regime and Survive

The reconciliation process partially failed. The main reason was that the first measures of amnesty applied to the repentant GSPC combatants. It did not serve the process of pacification already engaged by the Algerian government. It was reported that by the beginning of 2006 a discontent took place in several Muslims countries due to the Prophet Mohammed caricatures being published in some Western countries, such as those by *Charlie Hebdomadaire* ¹¹⁷ in France, which negatively affected the public opinion in several countries and in Algeria for several weeks.

Consequently, on March 9, 2006, the GSPC published its communiqué to call the previous GSPC fighters just released from jail at that time to join the group (GSPC) in the mountains to defend the Prophet Mohammed's memory and to counter the Algerian Regime reconciliation program.¹¹⁸ By the same communiqué, the GSPC leader explained that first, the Algerian regime released some of the previous GSPC militants who were captured and imprisoned, and it was under the foreign NGO's pressure.

Second, the GSPC leader added that, it was useless to look for anyway to get out from jail by taking advantage of the Algerian regime reconciliation charter.

Finally, the GSPC leader reminded the repentant not to follow the regime tactics and that they had to respect their obligation to the GSPC group, "The GSPC calls all free brothers to forget the allegiance lent before their confinement and has join the ranks of their brothers Mujahidin to make to triumph the religion and to uproot the heresy of this country."¹¹⁹

It was mentioned that several repentant took advantage of the offered reconciliation measures and did not acknowledged the GSPC calls to join it again. It was noted that about only hundred out of more than 2000 freed prisoners who had been GSPC

¹¹⁷ Charlie Hebdomadaire (English: Charlie Weekly) is a French satirical political weekly newspaper, successor of *Hara-Kiri*, created in 1960, on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charlie_Hebdo

¹¹⁸ Al-Tawil, *Al-Qaeda Wa Akhwatouha*.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

militants rejoined the GSPC.¹²⁰ It was clear that the GSPC did not achieve its goal to undermine the Algerian regime reconciliation measures. On the other hand, the Algerian government was considered successful convincing the mainstream of the released prisoners to not join the GSPC. Many analysts pointed out that, despite the incapacity of the GSPC to convince its previous militants to rejoin the field against the Algerian regime, the GSPC leader did not display the reality of weakness at that time. The GSPC leader pursued his categorical refusal of the reconciliation and reaffirmed that his group would continue its war against the regime without mercy for victory or martyrdom. In addition, the GSPC was looking for an alternative solution to survive and face the regime's permanent pressure, "We announce to the tyrants that the GSPC Mujahidin prepared a parallel project to theirs, that will disrupt their plan soon and will prevent their sleep, so God wants it."¹²¹

It was understood the first time that the GSPC was preparing an alternative plan to overcome its failure by recruiting among the youth and gain the mainstream of its previous militants released under the reconciliation program. As was pointed out by some experts, the message revealed that the GSPC was preparing a plan to survive, but it was not so clear that it would be aligned with Al-Qaeda as an appropriate solution. This hypothesis will lead the author to lay out more details describing the GSPC alliance with Al-Qaeda.

7. The GSPC Toward Expansion

According to several regional experts, the expansion of the GSPC or its approach to Al-Qaeda took place after the accomplishment of the following three main objectives. First, it came closer to the Arabian combatants in Chechnya and acted as a broker in the Al-Qaeda networks.

Next, it took advantage of the services of Al-Qaeda Iraqi's branch, its field expertise and enhanced its militants' Jihad's ideology.

¹²⁰ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête Du Maghreb*.

¹²¹ "False Propaganda Revealed," translated by thesis author, Khalifa Hajji, in the Algerian newspaper *Elwatan*, September 5, 2005.

Finally, the third GSPC objective realized was to federate all the Maghreb *Salafist* groups around a regional project and to display its expertise in the media domain.

8. The GSPC Approaching Chechnya

According to reports, two months after taking the lead of the GSPC, Abdelwadoud sent a message of congratulations to the Chechen mujahidin for the murder of the renegade collaborator Ahmed Kadirov, considered as the Chechen president and pro-Russian by the previous Russian president, Vladimir Putin, in the separatist province of the North, Caucasia. It was an opportunity for the chief of the GSPC to send his message to praise the Chechen and several Arabic militants among them, such as Abou Hafs. It was also an occasion to blame some Muslim leaders, accusing them of selling their religion and their people to the unbelievers. He mentioned at the same time that some other leaders should be targeted, such as Karzai in Afghanistan and Malki in Iraq...”¹²²

As pointed out by Camille al-Tawil, the relations between the two mentioned leaders, Abdel Wadoud and Abou Hafs, quickly became tight, but only for a short period. This friendship was soon replaced by the Al-Qaeda leader in Iraq (Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi).¹²³ This relationship seemed a more strategic alliance that could facilitate GSPC leadership contact with the Al-Qaeda leader.

Since that decision, the GSPC leader concentrated all his efforts on the Iraqi front and was content with minimum relations with the Chechen Mujahidin. This was apparent when the GSPC leader addressed his condolences communiqués. First, he expressed sympathy for the death of the legal adviser of the Chechen combatants, Sheik Abou Omar Al-Sayaf, and Chechen leader, Bassaev chef, Shamil.¹²⁴ They were killed, respectively,

¹²² Al-Tawil, *Al-Qaeda Wa Akhwatouha*.

¹²³ The elimination of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, killed June 7th, 2006 in a U.S. Air Force raid near Baghdad, in the French newspaper *le Monde*, June 10, 2006, http://www.lemonde.fr/cgi-bin/ACHATS/acheter.cgi?offre=ARCHIVES&type_item=ART_ARCH_30J&objet_id=948143&clef=ARC-TRK-D_01 (accessed November 4, 2009).

¹²⁴ He was a Chechen militant Islamist and a leader of the Chechen separatist movement.

during confrontations with the Russian strengths in December 13, 2005, and by an explosion on July 10, 2006. Second, he expressed sympathy for the death of Zarkaoui, killed by air strike in Iraq on June 7, 2006.¹²⁵

Several experts figured out that there were clear differences comparing the content of the two condolence communiqués. It was reported that Zarqaoui had been described as a lion of Islam, which is a qualification generally reserved for Ben Laden. Bassev was described only as a lion of the Chechens.¹²⁶ The GSPC leader took advantage each time to emphasize that the GSPC, Chechen and Al-Qaeda groups had the same ideological objective by sharing the same ideology and waging the same war against the Islam enemies: Algerian regime, the Russians cursed in Chechnya and by the Americans in Iraq.

9. The GSPC Attempt to Attract the North African Groups

The GSPC leader communiqués related to local attacks and the declarations concerning the national politics focused on international politics. Also, they appeared to have concern for the different events agitating the Maghreb or the Middle East at that time. This shift, from a national preoccupation away from a main concern for the regional governments, is important.

One of the first meaningful demonstrations of this political shift was at the summit of the Arabian league that was held in Algiers on March 22–24, 2005. That summit had to make positive, institutional reforms. It was limited to declarations of intentions without making any real commitment. The leaders were satisfied to repeat the offer of Beirut in 2002, namely peace with Israel in exchange for the withdrawal of territories occupied since 1967.

¹²⁵ *Guidere, Al-Qaeda a la Conquête Du Maghreb.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Two days prior to the summit, the daily Algerian Newspaper “Alkhbar,” dated March 20, 2005, published an open letter sent by the GSPC chief to the Arab leaders in Algiers. In his letter, the GSPC leader called the summit “The summit of Arab humiliation.”¹²⁷

In this letter, he deplored the lack of discernment of Arab elites who had thrown themselves into the arms of communism, or into the arms of capitalism.¹²⁸ He said also that the cause of failure of the Arabic societies was due to their leaders. He accused them of betrayal, “...They are the seeds sown by the collaborative coalition Judeo-crossed in the body of the Muslim nation.”¹²⁹ This declaration of GSPC leader was, in reality, a literal return to a topic largely developed by Ben Laden a few months earlier, during the American elections.

In fact, it was in late 2004 when Ben Laden was interviewed and said that his goal was not fighting against the freedom, but to fight as the defender of Muslims against the foreigner interference or hegemony.¹³⁰

By taking up the themes, the GSPC leader tried to fit directly into the global iihad preached by Al-Qaeda, which regarded Muslim leaders as agents of the West and the Arab League as a puppet in the American hands.¹³¹ In the same letter, the GSPC leader presented the *Jihad* as the unique solution for the different issues facing the North African region societies,

The only real alternative for a Muslim nation to regain its sovereignty and its honor is to have emirs who fight *jihad* around the world ... our choice today is *jihad* and nothing else.¹³²

¹²⁷ Al-Tawil, *Al-Qaeda Wa Akhwatouha*.

¹²⁸ “The Summit of Arab Humiliation.” in Arabic by the Daily Algerian Newspaper *Al-Akhbar*, March 20, 2005.

¹²⁹ “The Summit of Arab Humiliation.” translated by thesis author, Khalifa Hajji in the daily Algerian Newspaper *Al-Akhbar*, on March 20, 2005.

¹³⁰ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête Du Maghreb*.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Al-Tawil, *Al-Qaeda Wa Akhwatouha*.

The GSPC leader reminded the Arabic leaders that what had happened to Saddam was to be taken as a lesson learned. It mentioned the efforts by the GSPC to get more support and mobilize the societies to undermine their respective regime is what led the GSPC to focus on the media finding it as successful a propaganda tool as when it was used by Al-Qaeda.

10. The GSPC Attempt to Improve and Expand Its Media Expertise

With the events of September 11, 2001, the GSPC formed a new form of spectacular terrorism based on the use of the media and reporters. The GSPC admirers have followed this path and developed the concept in varying forms, sometimes as atrocious as was Zarkaoui in Iraq.

In the summer 2005, the GSPC waged a big communication campaign within and outside of Algeria. Its objective was to improve its image, tarnished by years of an army presence that was resented by the Algerians. It also hoped to counter the aggressive campaign waged by the Algerian regime to support the charter for peace and reconciliation, which forced the GSPC to lose a number of its combatants.

Camille al-Tawil reported that there were two big communication campaigns, one just after Operation *Badr* of Mauritania¹³³ and the other just after the execution of two Algerian diplomats in Iraq.¹³⁴

a. Operation *Badr* at the Algerian Mauritanian Borders

Although many experts and local analysts saw that the goal of operation *Badr* was collecting more weapons, the same experts realized that the factors of success of this mission were the isolated position of the attacked post. Additionally, the collaboration of some local Mauritians smugglers played a role.

¹³³ Salima Tlemçani "Mokhtar Belmokhtar vante son allegiance à Al Qaida," *Algeria-Watch*, September 13, 2006, http://www.algeria-watch.org/fr/article/mil/sale_guerre/caserne_mauritanie.htm (accessed on November 4, 2009).

¹³⁴ Al-Tawil. *Al-Qaeda Wa Akhwatouha*.

For its part, the GSPC declared that the main reasons for the *Badr* operation were to revenge their brother Mujahidin arrested by the Mauritanian regime, hit the *Flintlock*¹³⁵ plan established by America and its agents in the region to combat the GSPC, and to ignite the flame of Jihad.¹³⁶

The GSPC leader invited young North Africans to, “come learn the art of combat and prepare to light the fire under the feet of infidels and apostates.”¹³⁷

This appeal was largely diffused and was relegated to the jihad forums, accompanied by a long video of a battle of *Badr* operations in the desert of Mauritania and Algeria. The GSPC objective was to publish this operation on its Web site as another seductive way to recruit supporters among the regional youth.

A week after the execution of the operation, a statement to Al-Qaeda in Iraq, signed by the head of the media division of the organization (so-called Abu Maysara Al-Iraq), congratulated the GSPC for its operation against the enemies of Allah in Mauritania.¹³⁸ The Al-Qaeda response was considered very important because it was the first time that Al-Qaeda expressed its admiration of another group not among its affiliation. Therefore, the GSPC leader expressed that the two groups (GSPC and Al-Qaeda in Iraq) started to be united.¹³⁹ This link was later displayed by the kidnapping and the execution of two Algerian diplomats by Zarqawi in Iraq.

b. The Algerian Hostages Case

It was only one month after operation *Badr* in Mauritania that two Algerian diplomats (Ali Bellaroussi and Ezzeddine Bekhadhi) were abducted by Al-

¹³⁵ “The Trans-Saharan Counter-Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI),” *By Dawn’s Early Light*, November 21, 2005, http://dawnsearlylight.blogs.com/del/2005/11/fighting_future.html (accessed on November 7, 2009).

¹³⁶ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Al-Tawil, *Al-Qaeda Wa Akhwatouha’*.

¹³⁹ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

Qaeda in Iraq fighters.¹⁴⁰ They were threatening to execute them if the Algerian government did not cease all cooperation with coalition forces in Iraq and with the Iraqi interim government at that time.

In his first statement dated July 23, 2005, the GSPC expressed his immense satisfaction for the work of Al-Qaeda in Iraq. A week later, on July 28, 2005, specifically, the GSPC leader officially expressed its great satisfaction for the murder of the two Algerian diplomats and re-expressed his admiration for Al-Qaeda in Iraq.

It was reported at that time by the Algerian newspapers and mainly by Al-Akhbar, that the GSPC leader affirmed the preeminence of the religious fraternity over ethnic nationality.

However, this later GSPC declaration caused a national and international debate. After that, the GSPC became more isolated. Its attitude towards the two chief diplomats caused the GSPC to be increasingly condemned not only by the Algerian people but also by the Communities International, which let it lose rather than gain support.¹⁴¹

The GSPC believed that the Algerian newspapers used false information provided by the Algerian security forces. Consequently, the GSPC proceeded by scanning and publishing on its Web site in January 2006, the set of its communiqués and all its main publications except the communiqués related to the period of the ex GSPC leader Hassen Hattab, who probably carried them away with him after his resignation in 2003.¹⁴²

The expertise gained by the GSPC in putting up a Web site was a revolution for the GSPC. It was reported that the GSPC started to control and monitor all the communication process from the production of materials (news, magazine, sound recording, film or video board).

¹⁴⁰ “Les deux diplomat Algériens pris en otage en Irak,” translated by thesis author, Khalifa Hajji, *El-Watan Al-Araby*, July 22, 2005.

¹⁴¹ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹⁴² Ibid.

It was also realized that despite the incessant efforts provided by the Algerian security services computer expert to jam or to confuse the GSPC message, it became virtually impossible to stop the GSPC message by any actions against propaganda or disinformation campaigns.

According to an unofficial discussion between an Algerian senior officer who is a computer engineer and this author that during these later visits to Algiers in 2005 and in 2007, it was impossible to counter the GSPC jihadist propaganda efficiently. However, the option for the Algerian security forces was to deactivate the use of the group's Web site (GSPC) which in turn reacted by regularly changing the Web address and belie any false information broadcast by the Algerian security services.

Indeed, the video was the major innovation of the GSPC in the year 2006. It was imitating the propaganda methods of Al-Qaeda in Iraq. The GSPC required all members to film their attacks, day and night. Those media actions have galvanized the fighting and GSPC became more isolated, in the large desert and the huge mountains of Alger, losing the society supports mainly after expressing its satisfaction for the two diplomat murders in Iraq.

It was argued by several experts that, although the videos showed that the GSPC was a victorious group, those who were lost in battle were recognized as martyrs. This doctrine of martyrdom was already preached by Al-Qaeda in Iraq at that time. It stressed the importance of propaganda through the means of proper communication.¹⁴³

By September 2006, the nature of the connection between the GSPC and the central command of Al-Qaeda under Ben Laden and Zawahiri leadership was not so clear.

According to Guidere, the period of observation lasted a whole year, from September 2005 to September 2006. During that period, the analysts consider that many internal reforms had been undertaken to meet the exigencies of Al-Qaeda. The most important was the way the GSPC displayed its communication expertise facing the Algerian regime, saying it was presenting false information. In addition, the GSPC

¹⁴³ Botha, "Terrorism in the Maghreb."

developed their propaganda expertise as used by Al-Qaeda. Once the GSPC met the Al-Qaeda requirements in communications methods and propaganda expertise, Al-Qaeda embraced its affiliation.

11. The Allegiance to Al-Qaeda

In a September 2006 video message commemorating 9/11, Al-Qaeda deputy Al-Zawahiri said: “We pray to God that the GSPC will be a thorn in the throats of the American and French Crusaders and their allies (...) this should be a source of chagrin, frustration and sadness for the traitors and apostate sons of France.”¹⁴⁴

On September 14, 2006, just two days after the video of Zawahiri was broadcast announcing the allegiance of the GSPC to Al-Qaeda, the Algerian group (GSPC) published a communiqué confirming its allegiance to the Al-Qaeda leader (Sheik Osama):

We are glad to inform our Islamic nation and our Muslim brothers around the world about the great news which the *Mujahedeen* have been waiting for... the news of the merging of the *Salafist* Group for Prayer and Combat in Algeria with Al-Qaeda, ... We have decided to swear *Bayat* to Sheikh Osama Ben Laden and to continue our *jihad* in Algeria as soldiers under his command, for him to use us in the cause of Allah when and where he sees fit....¹⁴⁵

Finally, on January 24, 2007, the Algerian group announced that its name had shifted from GSPC to the organization of Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) or as reported in some other publications (*Tanzim Al-Qaeda Bi-Bilad Al-Magrib Al-Islami*) Al-Qaeda in the Land of the Islamic Maghreb. This declaration led the author to analyze the impact of this name change on the different attacks carried out within Algeria. Were there any links between the AQIM and the different operations carried out in the other Maghreb countries by their radical groups? Is the AQIM really taking the leadership of all the radical groups in the Maghreb? Which kind of links could exist between the AQIM and the other radical groups mainly in Tunisia, Morocco and Libya?

¹⁴⁴ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹⁴⁵ Kohlmann, “Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria.”

The author will focus on the 2007 attacks carried out in Algeria and in the other countries to present an objective analysis to the readers about the aim of the different groups.

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IV. THE MAIN AQIM OPERATIONS IN ALGERIA

The author analysis will focus on the operations carried out by AQIM within Algeria or abroad during 2007. In addition to the AQIM operations the analysis will cover the different operations conducted by other north African radical groups in their respective countries (Tunisia, Morocco and in Libya), except the Mauritanian Group operations which will be subject to further studies.

A. THE OPERATION OF BOUCHAOUI

The operation of Bouchaoui was the first concrete manifestation of the allegiance of the GSPC with Al-Qaeda, after attacking mainly Western foreign interests. On December 10, 2006, the GSPC, newly admitted to Al-Qaeda, led an attack in Bouchaoui (region in West Algiers) against a bus carrying employees of a U.S. Oil company. The attack killed one person and wounded nine others, most of them Western (British, Americans, and Canadians).

The first attack against the group of foreigners was claimed by a statement posted on jihadist forums January 23, 2007, which was one day before the change of name of group. The statement was accompanied by a complete film of the operation starting by tracking the sites, bomb making, monitoring, live explosive practice, and demonstrations of the character of its professional combatants. The GSPC/AQIM video was preceded by an introduction featuring Ben Laden and his deputy Zawahri. The investigation at that time demonstrated that the Bouchaoui perpetrators were supported by some of their local area informants.¹⁴⁶ This operation has been highly publicized for several reasons. First of all, because the AQIM attacked one of the powerful American oil companies, Halliburton, and secondly, because that operation had been filmed in full by the GSPC/AQIM. The video recording has been widely circulated and commented on in forums and the media worldwide.

¹⁴⁶ Mohammed M'kaddem, "Tahkikat," *Al-Hayet* Newspaper, April 12, 2007.

Finally, the GSPC/AQIM utilized the topographical visualization software Google Earth, developed by a U.S. company, to prepare this operation against an American target.

B. THE ABU AL-BARRA OPERATION

On Tuesday, February 13, 2007, at 4:30 a.m., the Mustafa Boumerdes region residents 50 km east of the capital Algiers awoke to the sound of explosions. Many feared it was an earthquake in a region known for its seismic activity. However, after a while, the Boumerdes population realized that the AQIM had exploded six cars simultaneously close to the police center by remote control.¹⁴⁷

This attack followed by several other attacks in a different Algerian regions killed more than a hundred dead and wounded of police and security forces, besides the destruction of some public buildings.

Two weeks after the attacks of February 13, 2007, the AQIM released a statement entitled, “the comedy bombs defused.” This release countered the reports that appeared in the Algerian press and picked up by the International press about several bombs that had been defused by security forces.

The statement added that the Algerian people may be fooled by the disinformation, but the group has learned lessons from the past and those civilians were never and would not ever be its goal, “It is not surprising that the tyrants who perpetrated the crimes against Muslims and blame them on the *mujahedeen*. They did that in the past and could do it in the future ... In this case we promise to revenge our brothers and punish the tyrants for their crimes.”¹⁴⁸

In another statement preceding the next attack planned for April 11, 2007, the AQIM has called on Algerians to reassure them: “Do not worry! Your *mujahedeen* brothers know very well how to choose their targets.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Botha. *Terrorism in the Maghreb*.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

C. THE APRIL 11, 2007, ATTACKS

The April attacks were qualified by the organization itself as “operation unique.” The statement said they had been thoroughly planned and prepared, carefully selected targets.

The first target was the Government Palace in Algiers and the bomber who led the operation was a man called by his war name “Muadh Ibnou Jabal.”¹⁵⁰ The vehicle, which was aimed at the government palace, contained, according to the statement of AQIM, 700kg of explosives. The organization claimed more than 45 dead and an unknown number of wounded in addition to badly damaging the building. The second AQIM target was the Interpol headquarters in Algiers (Bab Ezzouwar). The author of the attack was “Abu Zubayr Sajida” (war name) who was heading toward the building with a vehicle also loaded with 700kg of explosives. The seat of “anti-Jihad” in the words of the AQIM was completely destroyed, killing eight persons among the occupants (official figure).¹⁵¹

The third target was also in Bab Ezzouwar (Algiers). It was the headquarters of Special Forces police. The attack was perpetrated by the so called “Abou Doujana” (name of Martyr,) who was bearing down on the building with a car packed with 500kg of explosives. The number of dead and wounded was unknown, the statement said, but the AQIM claimed more than 200 dead and wounded, besides the two buildings being completely destroyed and the palace of government partially damaged. Nearly two tons of explosives were used in these nearly simultaneous operations as reported by the investigators after the attacks.¹⁵²

The first explosion, the palace of government, had been operated by the bomber himself as suicide bomber, but the other two, those of Bab Ezzouwar were by remote control. AQIM has changed the GSPC tactics of a direct confrontation by using a remote

¹⁵⁰ “La Liste Des Principaux Attentats Commis En Algerie Depuis 2005,” *Associated Press*, August 2008, <http://infosplanetaires.zeblog.com/347255-les-principaux-attentats-commis-en-algerie-depuis-2005/> (accessed on November 7, 2009).

¹⁵¹ Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*.

¹⁵² Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

control car bomb. The technique that has been used by the AQIM warriors was considered easier and less costly in human lives, and it indicated the degree of its professional ranks.

The April 11 attacks have shown the high degree of professionalism of the combatants by AQIM: simultaneous explosions triggered at a distance, car bombs, suicide bombers candidates, propaganda machine very efficient, and selective recruitment. The AQIM had chosen its new strategy based on its experience going from the periphery to the center, from the mountains to the cities. This new strategy has enabled it to compensate for his lack of fighters and let it take advantage of the media to confirm its presence and ability to attack the Algerian regime.

In an audio recording published by the Al-Ribat¹⁵³ just two days after the attacks of April 13, 2007, the preacher described as “Abu al-Harith” explained the different reasons that led the AQIM to carry out the Algiers attacks:

The first reason was the Traitor Algerian regime and its collaboration with the Americans who ran the national oil wealth.

The second reason in the record was military cooperation with the Americans. He cited that several military camps were built in the desert in addition to the Rouiba Air Base, which conceded to the U.S. Air Force. For AQIM, this was considered the beginning of foreign occupation, and its presence must be fought by all means.

Finally, the third reason given was the adoption of the Algerian regime of “anti-Islamic” modeled on the Americans in their fight against terrorism.¹⁵⁴

The Algerian President Abdellaziz Boutaflika declaration, “We do not want an Islamic state or a secular state, and we want a democratic state,”¹⁵⁵ has been strongly criticized in the AQIM leader’s speech. It was a chance for AQIM to mock the democracy as practiced in Algeria. For all these reasons, the preacher called on the

¹⁵³ This recording was available on the AQIM Web site www.qmaghreb.org, which was shut down by the Algerian Security Forces (n.d.).

¹⁵⁴ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

combatants of the AQIM organization to hit the regime, and he has supported the Algerian struggle of the mujahedeen in every way. The same person also recalled some points that had been in an earlier release such as warning security forces not to fight by any means, otherwise they would be severely punished: “No repentance will not be disturbed in his life. We ask him not to join us, but simply not to fight us either by arms, by money or by discourses...”¹⁵⁶

By analyzing its different attacks in 2007, it is evident that AQIM focused on government and security targets while trying to avoid the loss of human life among civilians and in its own ranks. These attacks were conducted in early morning or overnight, using car bombs and remote-controlled devices, though there were some suicide bombing. Most of these attacks have been publicized through the Internet in order to legitimize the group’s actions and for it to appear as being powerful.

So, despite its efforts, AQIM still has not succeeded in mobilizing Algerian society and gaining international support to get rid of the Algerian regime.

The struggle waged by AQIM against the Algerian regime failed. The AQIM was unable to counter the reconciliation program proposed by the Algerian regime. The AQIM also failed to recruit the needed number of fighters to its front. The media battle was won by the Algerian regime. Guidere pointed out that since its media campaign, the AQIM was waging a battle to survive.

It was reported also that the Algerian regime disable the AQIM Web site.¹⁵⁷ Moreover, despite the numerous operations conducted against Algerian security forces and foreign interests, the AQIM was weakened and its actions were totally isolated. The Algerian minister of interior said, “The GSPC, an ally of Al-Qaeda or not is a movement which tends to be eradicated completely and does not pose a problem and poses no threat.”¹⁵⁸ In addition to the Algerian representative government statement after the

¹⁵⁶ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹⁵⁷ This recording was available on the AQIM Web site www.qmaghreb.org, which was shut down by the Algerian Security Forces (n. d).

¹⁵⁷ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

attacks of April 11, 2007, and as presented at that time by the Al-Jazira News, the FIS (Front Islamique Salut) leaders Abbassi Madani and Rabih Kabir have both condemned the attacks from their exile respectively Qatar and Suisse but they accused the Algerian regime to be behind these attacks directly or indirectly.¹⁵⁹

Consequently, it appears obvious that the evolution of the Algerian group to shift its name from GSPC to AQIM had been made without consulting the other actors in the Algerian Islamist movement or even other small groups that are not affiliated to GSPC, who worked in Algerians mountains. It was a personal decision of the GSPC leader who spent two years struggling to join the organization of, making a special, solitary Algerian Jihad. It had been designed so that the name change and the aggressive attacks were against the Algerian society and the interests of the country. The AQIM marginalized other religious parties such as former FIS and prevented them from being involved in the political System.

This situation led the author to check to determine if there is any link between AQIM and the other radical groups in Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya. The link between the AQIM cited and the radical groups in North Africa will be checked via an analysis of the different operations carried out in 2007 by the cited groups separately or combined.

¹⁵⁹ Presented on “Al-Jazira News,” on Al Jazeera TV, translated by thesis author, Khalifa Hajji, April 11, 2007.

V. THE AQIM AND THE NORTH AFRICAN RADICAL GROUPS PROBABLE LINKS STUDIES

A. THE TUNISIAN RADICAL ACTIVIST GROUP

The first religious party raised in the 1980s was *Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami*, or the Islamic Liberation Party (ILP)—which was founded in Jerusalem in 1948 in order to liberate Palestine and was aimed at the establishment of an Islamic state and the restoration of the Caliphate in the entire Muslim world. The ILP formed a branch in Tunisia and started its clandestine activities. The government became aware of its activities and prosecuted 29 members.¹⁶⁰

Despite the non-existence of Al-Qaeda during that period, Tunisia experienced a Moslem ideals advancement of importance. The main actor of this was the Al-Nahdha movement, a fundamentalist Moslem renaissance movement created in 1981. The group seized the opportunity for advancement because of the liberalization of the political system by the previous Tunisian president, Habib Bourguiba. This movement took the Islamic tendency movement as a name (MTI), before becoming Al-Nahdha in 1989.¹⁶¹

Rashed Al-Ghannoushi, the MTI leader influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria and by Salafism when he was at university in Damascus, was convinced that social reform based on the true principles of Islam was the only option for his country. Al-Ghannoushi made the following observation when he returned to Tunisia, “I remember we used to feel like strangers in our own country. After having been educated as Muslims and Arabs, we found our own country totally molded in the French cultural identity.”¹⁶²

During this stage, the government generally tolerated Islamic movements, which were not considered a threat. Leftist elements were then regarded as the primary threat, with Islamist movements counterbalancing the left, particularly in mosques, schools and

¹⁶⁰ Emad E. Shahin, *Political Ascent: Contemporary Islamic Movements in North Africa* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 69-70, 81-82.

¹⁶¹ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹⁶² Shahin, *Political Ascent*, 69–70.

universities. In its early days, the MTI focused on moral issues and was considered as a “religious association with reformist tendencies.”¹⁶³ With the government presenting itself as favoring Islamic principles, to face the leftists’ activities after the failure of Ahmed Ben Salah (the former minister of planning 1961–1969) in adopting the cooperative system, the MTI was free to broaden its support base.

Anneli Botha quoted that Shahin pointed out that the MTI was well structured and included three main cells, *Usar Maftuha*, *Usar Multazim*, and *Al-Maktab Al-Siyas*. The main function of these different cells had different tasks.

In 1979, the Tunisian activist group (MTI), as well as several religious organizations in the Muslim world inspired by the Iranian revolution, started to be more active. At first, the Tunisian government began to question the motives of the Islamist movements, and this often led to open confrontation. Becoming defensive and trying to undermine the MTI efforts under the pretext to revive the lost Islamic principles within the Tunisian society, the Tunisian government tried to project the state as the guardian of Islam as stated by the Former Tunisian Interior Minister Driss Guiga in 1981.¹⁶⁴

Later and according its conference held in May 1981, the MTI decided to keep its clandestine base; it also worked to achieve broader recognition by forming alliances with other political role-players.¹⁶⁵ The MTI asked for recognition as a political party by opting for a political non-violent approach. But the government reacted in July 1981 by arresting 60 members, including the MTI leadership, charging them with forming an illegal organization, defaming the president and publishing false news reports.¹⁶⁶

In order to eliminate any kind of pretext used by the MTI to mobilize the society and in an attempted reconciliation with moderate Islamists, President Ben Ali introduced measures including the reinstatement and reaffirmation of Islam as the country’s

¹⁶³ Shahin, *Political Ascent*, 84.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Muhammad Mahmoud, “Women and Islamism: The Case of Rashid Al-Ghannushi of Tunisia,” in Abdel Salam Sidahmed and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *Islamic Fundamentalism* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1996): 249-266.

¹⁶⁶ Shahin, *Political Ascent*.

religion, the adoption of a more conciliatory attitude towards what for the first time was considered moderate Islamism and strict legal measures against all types of subversive activity in the name of Islam. In addition, Tunisia has achieved poverty alleviation and state-society synergy through the country's impressive National Solidarity Fund (NSF) or as known in French acronym *Fonds de Solidarité Nationale* (FNS), also known as “*Caisse 26-26*” (26- 26 Fund).¹⁶⁷

The MTI expressed its willingness to adhere to the new party law of 1988, which prohibited the formation of political parties on the basis of religion, region or language and changed its name to *Harakat an-Nahda* or the Renaissance Movement.¹⁶⁸ In essence, it was perceived that *An-Nahda* hoped to introduce *Shari'a* law through participating plan in the electoral process, as adapted by some other organizations, such as the FIS, had done in Algeria.

In the elections of April 1989, *An-Nahda* candidates attracted tremendous support for the party's ideals, gaining a position as the opposition.¹⁶⁹ Although *An-Nahda*'s application to be a political party had been turned down, its candidates stood as independents and won 15 percent of the total vote, with up to 40 percent in major cities including Tunis. However, instead of being admitted to parliament the *An-Nahda* independents were arrested on suspicion of attempting to overthrow the government.¹⁷⁰ In summary, while *An-Nahda* presented itself as a non-violent political party, it was implicated in clashes with security forces, accused by planning to overthrow of the government and replacing it with an Islamic state. In reaction, Tunisian government declared that *An-Nahda* was illegal.

It was perceived that Al-Qaeda did not succeed in attracting the Tunisian youth despite the exploding situation in the neighboring Algeria at that time. Based on its security force's efforts, Tunisia was still safe up to the end of December 2006, In January

¹⁶⁷ Larbi Sadiki, “National Solidarity Fund as an Alternative Model,” in *Arab Reform Bulletin*, December 2008, <http://www.tunisiaonline.com/pressbook/washtimes/1.html>, (accessed on November 7, 2009).

¹⁶⁸ Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Shahin, *Political Ascent*, 100-101.

2007, a terrorist threat appeared. This threat was apparent after dismantling an armed group of thirty people in quasi-totality of the Tunisian with only one Mauritanian.¹⁷¹

The group was directed by a former policeman, thirty-six years of age, named Lassaad Sassi. He resigned many years earlier for insubordination; after that, he escaped Tunisia in the beginning of 1990. He followed the course typical of all Afghans combatants then. He joined Bosnia, Chechen, Afghanistan then return to Italy. Until May 2001, he was a director of a *jihadist* cell in Milan, Italy. It was reported that this cell provided false passports, military clothing and money to suspicious organization members in order to facilitate their travel and finance bloody operations in Italy or elsewhere.¹⁷² However, by the starting point of the investigations and almost everywhere after the attempts of the September 11, 2001, Sassi feared being captured, so he escaped from Italy. He likely took refuge in the Algerian mountains or in the desert near of the Mali frontiers or Niger, where his previous Afghans fighters were maneuvering. Sassi improved his use of the weapons and the explosives, and participated in some attacks in the Sahara against Algerian, or regional targets such as in Mauritania in 2005.¹⁷³

Sassi's group arrived close to Grombalia, a small city not far from Tunis (30klms of Tunis), without awakening the soupcons. Then they installed their training camp and, no more than three months later, were able to recruit about twenty Tunisian young people and start to train them on how to use automatic weapons and the handling of the explosives.¹⁷⁴

The targets believed to be the aim of the group were the American and the Great Britain embassies, as well as of the diplomats and the tourist sites in Hammamet, about 50klms south Tunis. After the terrorist group plan was dismantled, it was condemned by all the Tunisian society in addition to the international community. It was claimed only on an Islamist Web site, the *Youth of Tawhid and Jihad* in Tunisia, which declared a *jihad* on President Ben Ali, accusing him of harming Muslims in general and Muslim

¹⁷¹ Abdellaziz Barrouhi (2007), *Peur sur le Maghreb, Jeune Afrique*, 2401, 60–66.

¹⁷² Barrouhi (2007), *Peur sur le Maghreb*.

¹⁷³ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹⁷⁴ Barrouhi, *Peur sur le Maghreb*.

women in particular by not allowing them to wear headscarves. Tunisia and other Muslim countries striving to enhance women's rights have been confronted by extremist organizations that consider these practices "un-Islamic."¹⁷⁵ In the same context, Guidere pointed out that the *Youth of Tawhid and Jihad* in Tunisia issued on January 6, 2007, the following communiqué:

These young have sacrificed what they had dearer to challenge the régime that has dared to take on our sisters of it. The Moslem in Tunisia are victims of a wave of oppression because of their head scarves and the Tunisian youngsters are forced to shave their beard. The Tunisian regime has to know that will finish in hell .We will fight them without relaxation until they remove their hands of our veiled sisters and they quit their aggressions...¹⁷⁶

Many believed that despite its announcement that the GSPC was aligned with Al-Qaeda and the name of the GSPC became AQIM, the Tunisian activist group was and still is the moderate group in North African countries. After the mentioned claim by the *Youth of Tawhid and Jihad in Tunisia*, it was felt also that the group probably used Algeria only as safe haven and a training area. There was no evidence confirming that the Tunisian group was ordered by the AQIM to carry out bloody operations in Tunisian territory, which confirms that there was no clear organizational link between the two groups. It was possible that an ideological link could probably exist between the two groups based on the *Salafiya* strategy that allows the use of violence to reach a political goal.

In its domestic situation, Tunisia is considered safe compared to all the North African countries. The Tunisian government's consciousness of the youth ambitions, embarked on a plan to address the country's socio-economic needs planning investment and employment opportunities. The government of Tunisia continued to place a high priority on combating extremism and terrorism. In addition to using security and law enforcement measures, the Tunisian government pursued a variety of economic and social programs aimed at addressing the underlying challenges that can contribute to the

¹⁷⁵ Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*.

¹⁷⁶ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

spread of extremism. The Tunisian government actively prevented the formation of terrorist groups inside Tunisia, including prohibiting the formation of religious-based political parties and groups that it believed would pose a terrorist threat.

B. THE MOROCCAN RADICAL GROUP

Several small Islamist organizations started to rise between the 1960s and 1970s, mainly on university campuses. The principal organizations were: *Al-Islamiya* (the Islamic Association), *Al-Adl Wal Tanmiya* (the Justice Organization) and *al-Adl Wal Ihsane* (Justice and Spirituality). According to Shahin 1997, the circumstances that galvanized the rise of the mentioned organizations are the high unemployment, inadequate social services and a rapidly growing population has inevitably led many Moroccans feeling disenfranchised and dissatisfied.¹⁷⁷

Despite the Casablanca attacks in 2003, which left many victims in its aftermath: 44 killed and several wounded, this present research will focus only on the analysis of the operations carried out in 2007 by the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group (GICM: French acronym as: Groupe Islamique Combatant marocain). The author will try to identify through the analysis of the attacks attempts, any clue confirming its links with AQIM or the other North African radical groups.

Similar to the other North African activist groups, the GICM was initially established in the late 1990s by Moroccans who had fought the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan. The GICM was headed by Abdelkrim Al-Medjati until he was killed in a shootout with security forces in Saudi Arabia in 2005.¹⁷⁸ It was believed that the initial role of the GICM was to provide logistical support to Al-Qaeda operatives when they passed through Morocco to recruit followers for waging bloody operations against any vulnerable target, such as the Madrid bombing in 2004.¹⁷⁹ It was also pointed out that Morocco was the first country in North Africa targeted by Al-Qaeda to recruit fighters for

¹⁷⁷ Shahin, *Political Ascent*.

¹⁷⁸ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹⁷⁹ Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*.

Iraq (100 fighters in 2006).¹⁸⁰ But, according to Sinjar¹⁸¹ 2008, Morocco was among the first Foreign Fighters provider for Iraqi's front after Libya and Algeria, as shown in the Map in Appendix I.

On March 6, 2007, the Moroccan securities services arrested a military chief of the GICM, Saad Houssaini, in a cybercafé.¹⁸² At the time of the arrest, the Moroccan police did not know what the real objective of Houssaini was. But the local chief of the GICM in Casablanca named Abdel Aziz Bin Zine as the suspect; he was arrested on March 11, 2007, after being located by intercepting his cell phone calls. At the beginning of Abdel Aziz Bin Zine's cross-examination, the Moroccan investigators believed that he was a key person for one or several operations that were going to be led against several objectives. They realized that Abdel Aziz Bin Zine would have given the orders for two GICM members, Abdelfatteh Alraydi (23) and Youssef khoudry, (18) to explode themselves on March 11, 2007, against selected targets.¹⁸³

The two youngsters were finally ready on March 11, 2007, as a "D" day to play suicide bombers. They were equipped with exploding belts. They were waiting all day for a phone call from Abdel Aziz Bin Zine, but they did not get the call because the police had already arrested him. The two kamikazes were worried and they had doubt, especially after being unable to contact Abdel Aziz Bin Zine via his cell phone, which he did not answer.¹⁸⁴

At 9 p.m. on March 11, 2007, Abdelfatteh Alraydi and Youssef khoudry entered Faiz cybercafé, close to the Boulevard Al Andalus in Casablanca, in order to see if they had already received an e-mail from Abdel Aziz Bin Zine.

The Moroccan police reported that there had been only three people in the cyber coffeehouse: the manager Fayeze and two other customers who were lively with chatter on MSN. The two kamikazes settled before a computer, but they did not have anything suspicious, other than each carried a jacket that appeared bigger than their size, as if they

¹⁸⁰ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹⁸¹ Sinjar is a small Syrian city located close to the Iraqi border.

¹⁸² Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*.

¹⁸³ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

wanted to hide things in it. After a few minutes, they moved from the first station to a second one after realizing initially that the first one did not work very well. After shifting to a second computer, they had the same problem because the Internet forums that they wanted to visit were blocked automatically each time they tried to be connected. Blocking this kind of Web site was and still is a security measure imposed by the Moroccan securities services in all cyber cafés after the Casablanca bombing in 2003.¹⁸⁵

The Manager Mohamed Fayez possessed a control screen behind his counter that allows him to follow the activity of the computer users and allows him to verify and intervene to unblock the system in case of a mistake or a breakdown of the computer. But, based on his first feeling that Abdelfatteh Alraydi and Youssef Khoudry appeared suspicious and were strangers to the district, he did not unblock the computer.¹⁸⁶

So, after several unsuccessful attempts, the two men became so nervous and started to hit the computer keyboard. At that time, the manager intervened, protesting, but the tone went up and the two men got ready to leave and refused to pay, arguing that they could not use the computers.

The manager Fayez closed and locked the door of the store and called the police. Everybody was locked inside the cyber coffeehouse. The tension was at its zenith, as one reported. In order to avoid falling into the hands of the police, one of the two kamikazes hurried to the floor of the store and triggered his explosive load, ravaging the inside of the cyber cafe. According to the witnesses reporting to the Moroccans police, the first kamikaze shouted with a high voice, “Dying better than falling between the police’s hands.”¹⁸⁷

The other kamikaze withdrew his belt of explosives and used it to break the door of the cyber coffeehouse while hoping to flee before the arrival of the police. But he was severely wounded and burned his face. After that, it was difficult to recognize him. Despite his miserable status, he ran away from the cyber café. He was stopped by the

¹⁸⁵ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Botha, *Terrorism in the Maghreb*.

police at Sidi Othman hospital in Casablanca later in the same day. His confessions allowed the Moroccans security services to recover the other members of the cell only a few hours before they were to carrying out bloody operations on April 11, 2007.

In order to understand what was behind the March and April 11, 2007, Casablanca kamikaze operations, it is important to focus on the first cyber cafe kamikaze, Abdelfateh Al-Raydi, and analyze his background and his environment to explore his reasons for behaving as a suicide bomber. Since the age of 18, Abdelfateh Al-Raydi had been a militant of the Moroccan *salafiya Jihadiya*, was condemned to five years of jail, and was accused of having ties with the performers of Casablanca attacks.

Released from jail by the end of 2005, Abdelfateh Al-Raydi got married and became the father of a small boy in February of 2007. The Moroccan regime believed that having Abdelfateh Al-Raydi stay in jail would calm him, but the result was the opposite. He became more radical. His determination was to sacrifice himself as the only honorable solution. Abdelfateh Al-Raydi, descended of the shantytown Douar of Skouila, was without a job and he was, as some of “Martyrdom” was, seeing himself without promise or opportunity.

Based on an intelligence source, Abdelfateh Al-Raydi was inspired by another Moroccan GICM leader, Saad El Houssaini. He was born in Meknes in 1968, had a deep knowledge in chemistry that allowed him to perform and to teach how to make artificial bombs. He had an academic foundation in chemistry, which allowed him to lead the Islamic group combatants in Morocco. That is why he was known by the chemist of the GICM.¹⁸⁸

The majority of the GICM members participated in Afghanistan war, and they share the same *Salafist* Al-Qaeda ideology, which allows the use of violence to reach a political goal. But the nature of their targets diverges: Al-Qaeda’s goal is “The far enemy,” such as the USA and the West in general and their interest is in the Muslim countries. By contrast, the GICM was targeting “the near enemy” by fighting the

¹⁸⁸ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

Moroccan régime and royalty.¹⁸⁹ Due to the stern control and unfair Moroccan régime and its indiscriminate oppression, many of the GICM members took shelter in the mountains Algeria to escape the kingdom's security forces and to be with the GSPC/AQIM in the desert regions and the mountains difficult to access. There was no indication proving that the GICM was under the authority of the group Algerian GSPC/AQIM. In addition, the reasons that were behind the operations of the kamikaze were completely socio-economic. The kamikaze operations actors felt themselves disenfranchised and saw that sacrificing their life to get rid of their unsupportable life and take vengeance on the unfair Moroccan régime was good. They perceived that the government was unable to provide the vital social services to the poor.¹⁹⁰

Understanding the current and potential threat of terrorism to the region, it is essential to focus on the radicalization process as experienced in Morocco. As mentioned previously, the success of terror organizations is determined by their ability to adapt to changing circumstances and to use specific circumstances for their own advantage. Morocco's vulnerability to the terrorism is increased by poor socio-economic conditions concentrated in particular areas. While it is important in this step, to emphasize that not all the people in similar conditions of unemployment, illiteracy and isolation will turn to terrorism.

Yet, the aborted kamikaze operations in Morocco have proven that only poor socioeconomic conditions influence a person's susceptibility to be radicalized and no evident external influence from the AQIM.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Fawaz A, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁹⁰ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹⁹¹ John P. Entelis, "Republic of Tunisia," in *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*, 5th ed. Edited by David Long, Bernard Reich, and Mark Gasiorowski (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 2007).

C. THE LIBYAN ISLAMIC FIGHTING GROUP – LIFG – (AL-JAMA’A AL-ISLAMIYA AL-MUQATILAH BI LIBYA)

The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group LIFG is a movement jihadist, emerged by the 1980s in the middle of the Arabian combatants that appeared at that time. The Libyan Islamic Fighting Group LIFG, **was** officially created in 1995. The Libyan group counted in its ranks besides the elders of Libyan Afghan fighters who participated in the Afghanistan war against Russia, some other members from region countries (Chad, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria). The group started its revolt against the régime of Mouammar Kaddafi in 1990 then took the East of the country as a safe haven to avoid the Libyan regime repression. When the LIFG started to increase its struggle against the Libyan regime in 1980, the regime reacted by a ferocious repression, which forced the group to be implanted in the East of Libya. It was pointed out that Kaddafi gave the order to his security forces to kill LIFG members as “dogs,” as mentioned by Guidere in 2007—(Abattre les chiens islamistes comme des chiens : kill the Islamist Dog as killing Dogs).¹⁹²

After their initial unsuccessful attempt to face their domestic regime in the 1980s, the LIFG participated in the Afghan war, as well as the other radical groups in the region. It was perceived that the participation of LIFG combatants in the jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan increased their radicalization .Based on their skills, the LIFG Afghans have planned several unsuccessful attempts to murder the supreme leader Kaddafi, but he responded with more and more wild repression.

It was reported that in addition to his air force, Kaddafi pushed also on the revolutionary committees to sweep the LIFG camps and massacre the leftist fighters.¹⁹³ By the 1990s, about 3,000 Islamic activists were arrested after being accused of plotting to assassinate Kaddafi. This later described LIFG members as being worse than cancer

¹⁹² Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*, translated by thesis author, Khalifa Hajji.

¹⁹³ Camille Al-Tawil, “Tahkikat,” *Dar Alhayat* newspaper, issue no 1437, November 29, 2001.

and AIDS.¹⁹⁴ He (Kaddafi) was publicly excoriating the various Islamic opposition groups as being guilty of “heresy/atheism” as known in Arabic by “*Zandaqa*,” and accused all LIFG members of plotting against religion and denounced them.¹⁹⁵

Consequently, the police operations forced several LIFG chiefs to leave Libya for some foreign countries. However, a main portion of the militants remained in place, disseminated in the Desert Mountains of the South. It is necessary to mention that the major part of the country covers one of the most arid regions of the Sahara, which allows LIFG elements to find shelter there in places such as caves.

And, as it was mentioned in the previous chapter, a number the LIFG fighters chose to join the Camp of the Algerian group (GIA) to escape the repression of the Libyans and to take benefit of the GIA skills. But, it was reported that LIFG members did not enjoy their stay in the GIA camps in Algeria under the leadership of the GIA leader Antar Zouabri then Zitouni who was accused of murdering an LIFG leader (Abou Sakhar Al-Libi).¹⁹⁶

In June 1996, the LIFG issued a statement acknowledging that it had been engaged in “supporting the Jihad against the apostate in Algeria” and the Armed Islamic Group Algeria “based on the clear and scrupulous path that this group adopted throughout the years.” However, the LIFG also announced that it was immediately halting all such “support and aid” rendered to the GIA.¹⁹⁷

The Algerian radical group leader’s attitude obliged the LIFG combatants to change their camp probably to an uncontrolled area in Niger and Mali. In addition, this situation kept the LIFG in a non-comfortable situation, in unsafe maneuver camps. After September 2001, and facing their inferior situation, some local chiefs of the LIFG tried to get support from the central command of Al-Qaeda. The link was in particular with two

¹⁹⁴ Ann Elizabeth Mayer, “In Search of Sacred Law: The Meandering Course of Qaudhafi’s Legal Policy,” in *Qudhafi’s Libya: 1969 to 1994*, ed. Dirk Vandewalle (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 127.

¹⁹⁵ John C. K. Daly, “Libya and Al-Qaeda: a Complex Relationship,” in *Terrorism Monitor*, volume 3, Issue 6 (March 24, 2005).

¹⁹⁶ Al-Tawil, *Al-Qaeda Wa Akhwatouha*.

¹⁹⁷ Kohlmann, “Two Decades of Jihad in Algeria: the GIA, the GSPC and AL-Qaeda.”

high persons responsible of Al-Qaeda of origin Libyan: Abou Faraj Al-Libi al, then Abou Yahya all two fervid partisans of the global jihad and a unification of the jihadist's movements in Maghreb.¹⁹⁸

This new strategy opted by the GICL has been taken seriously by Kaddafi and let him join, at the cost of enormous concessions, the Western camp in 2005 and allowed a close collaboration of his security services with the secret European and American services. In a sign of good will, Washington immediately added the Libyan group (GICL) to the *black list* of the movement terrorists.¹⁹⁹

Due to the continuously repressive politics followed by the Libyan régime, several of the LIFG militants were encircled and massacred in the Libyan mountainous regions close to Chad North borders (Zone Tibesti). These massacres weakened the group and let certain of its spiritual chiefs, such as the sheik Miftah Al_Dawadh and the sheik Abdel Wahhab, call for a revision of the GICL doctrine and follow the model of the Egyptians Moslem brotherhood. But, the LIFG's young generation opposed the initiative to stop the violence initiated by the Libyan régime.²⁰⁰

The Libyans new generation took over while their historic chiefs had been jailed. By the end of 2006, the LIFG took the opportunity of the fifth birthday of the 9/11 to issue its communiqué to display its position and its objectives. By its communiqué, the LIFG accused the Kaddafi régime of "collaborating with the strangers, apostasy, liar and falsifier....waging a continuous war against Allah and the believers."²⁰¹ All these reasons justify, according to the LIFG, the armed struggle led against the Libyan régime but they seemed counterproductive.

On the pretext of giving the international community a sign of his human rights respect, Kaddafi called for the reconciliation, but the LIFG group denied any kind of reconciliation with the Libyan regime. In addition, the LIFG emphasized that it did not

¹⁹⁸ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

need to give up and surrender after depositing the weapons as proposed by the Libyan Leader. The group answered the Libyan régime with a message that the suggested strategy of reconciliation and negotiation did not work in Algeria where its régime tried to do everything in order to get rid of its Radical Islamist (AQIM).²⁰²

The GICL war against the Libyan regime continued. The LIFG leaders affirmed that there were two sides or two positions that were irreconcilable: first, sincere believers (the group militants) and second the apostate collaborators (the régime supports).²⁰³ Consequently, the LIFG refused all kind of moderate solutions, including any with the Western enemy: “No secret agreements and no negotiations in hiding place.”²⁰⁴ The LIFG accused the Libyan regime to integrate the LIFG members in its (Libyan regime) corrupted political system while giving some guaranties to the West.²⁰⁵

The LIFG reaffirmed its initial objective, “The institution of an Islamic state in Libya and the application of the Shari’a law.”²⁰⁶ The LIFG recalled that its engagement in the armed struggle against the Libyan regime was neither recent nor temporary, “We are convinced that the jihad is not a transient phase... We are using all our forces to reach the victory or the martyrdom.”²⁰⁷ It was noted that the LIFG finished its messages with a desperate call to Allah in order to decimate Kaddafi and his regime. But it was and still perceived that Kaddafi decimated the LIFG members and sympathizers which forced the GICL survivors to escape then join the Algerian radical group (GSPC).

The LIFG is one of the most enterprising of the region because of its direct contacts with hierarchy of Al-Qaeda. It was reported in an audio communiqué on Internet one month after the official creation of Al-Qaeda in Maghreb, February 20, 2007, Abou Yahya Al-Libi evoked the issue of the Bulgarian nurses and the Palestinian physician

²⁰² Al-Tawil Camille, *Al-Qaeda Wa Akhwatouha*.

²⁰³ Guidere, *Al-Qaeda a la Conquête du Maghreb*.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Mayer, *In Search of Sacred Law*.

²⁰⁶ Mathieu Guidere, “La Tentation Internationale D’Al-Qaeda au Maghreb,” translated by thesis author, Khalifa Hajji. *Focus Strategique*: IFRI Center des Etudes de Securite, no.12 (December 2008): 5-54.

²⁰⁷ Guidere, “La Tentation Internationale D’Al-Qaeda au Maghreb.”

condemned in December 2006, to have, according to the Libyan justice, voluntarily inoculated the virus of the AIDS into some children in a Libyan hospital. The condemnation triggered the protests of the international community and the defense made a judgment call in May 2007, to save their lives and to free them.²⁰⁸

Related to this case, Abou Yahya Al-Libi issued a communiqué of 17 minutes, accusing Kadhafi directly of having covered up the contamination of more than 400 children by the virus of the AIDS, “How can these killers perpetrate this crime against a number so important of innocent children without the knowledge of the Libyan tyrant, Kaddafi?”²⁰⁹

So, despite its long struggle and skills (111 fighters of its militants joined the Iraqis front),²¹⁰ the LIFG is still unable to realize its objectives, mainly after the involvement of the Libyan leader in global war on terrorism. The Libyan Radical perceived gave up after admitting the reconciliation with its regime. It has been more than two years since talks started between the Libyan authorities and the imprisoned leaders of the LIFG (Al-Jama’a al-Islamiya al-Muqatilah Bi Libya). As both sides acknowledge past mistakes, there are finally signs that the longtime antagonists may be getting closer to reconciliation. The process will rely in part on the LIFG’s renunciation of acting against the Libyan regime. It will need to renounce its merger with any foreign radical group such as al-Qaeda central or regionally with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), even for a short period.²¹¹

In addition, soon after the talks began, the leaders in exile of the LIFG suddenly started to come forward, after years of silence, to support the imprisoned leaders in the discussions with the Libyan government. First, there was a letter issued by Abdullah Mansour, a former leader of the LIFG in the United Kingdom and a member of its

²⁰⁸ Mayer, *In Search of Sacred Law*.

²⁰⁹ Guidere, “La Tentation Internationale D’Al-Qaeda au Maghreb.”

²¹⁰ Map of Foreign Fighters by Country of Origin in Sinjar, 2008.

²¹¹ Camille Al-Tawil, “Libyan Islamists Back Away from Al-Qaeda Merger in Reconciliation with Kaddafi Regime,” *Terrorism Monitor* 7, no. 17 (June 18, 2009): 5–6.

religious committee.²¹² Then there was an unsigned statement by a group of “former and present” members of the LIFG in the United Kingdom.²¹³ Both the letter and the statement had one aim in common: supporting the talks between the imprisoned LIFG leaders and the Libyan authorities. Both rejected the merger of the LIFG with Al-Qaeda that was announced by Dr. Ayman al-Zawahiri and Abu Laith Al-Libi in October 2007. The statement from former and present LIFG members was clear in saying that Abu Laith al-Libi lacked the proper authority to merge the LIFG with Al-Qaeda. It went on to say that the LIFG as an organization was never part of Ben Laden’s global war on the West and USA (the Far enemy)²¹⁴ as perceived, but always had a “local aim or domestic objective.”²¹⁵

As a response to the positive sign given by the LIFG to the Libyan regime, it was reported by Al-Hayat Newspaper published on July 19, 2009, that Colonel Qaddafi has issued instructions to the authorities to assist those who have been deceived by groups pretending to have an Islamic agenda, but who have now become mature enough to know that they were wrong in following such groups, to return to Libya without any fear of being harmed. The statement went on to say that those misguided Islamists (according to Kaddafi) in exile should be helped in their reintegration with Libyan society and in finding employment. It urged those still in the different foreign countries wishing to come back to Libya to contact Libyan embassies from where an arrangement can be made to repatriate them. The message was clear to the LIFG leaders in exile, “If you want to be part of the peace in Libya, return to your country, admit that you were misguided and do not try to make the LIFG equal in any way to the government.”²¹⁶

²¹² Camille Al-Tawil, “Tahkikat,” *Dar Alhayat*, June 11, 2008.

²¹³ Ibid., July 4, 2008.

²¹⁴ Gerges A. Fawaz, *The Far Enemy: Why Jihad Went Global* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ “For those Misguided Islamists Libyan In Exile,” translated by the thesis author, Khalifa Hajji, in *Al-Quds* Newspaper, July 19, 2009, <http://www.alquds.co.uk/index.asp?fname=today\02qpt72.htm&storytitle=ff>
 قياديون في 20% الجماعة الليبية المقاتلة 20% يؤيدون حوار 20% مع طرابلس 20% يقوده سيف 20% لاسلا
 =storytitlec=توفيق 20% رباحي&storytitleb&ff 20% القذافي (accessed on July 19, 2009).

Based on this analysis, it is clear that the LIFG members were forced to join the GIA then the GSPC and probably the AQIM in order only to escape the harsh Libyan régime. But as mentioned previously, the LIFG leader Abou Sakher Al-Libi refused to obey the GIA leaders that caused his death. This event forced the GICL to cut off any kind of link with the GIA. It was pointed out also that the LIFG suffered from a lack of strong leadership, cohesion and coordination²¹⁷. In addition, the LIFG already confirmed that it did not have any links with foreigners groups such as Al-Qaeda or AQIM or any other radical group. It was reported recently that, in September 2009, the imprisoned leadership of the LIFG, considered a prominent jihadist group allied with Al-Qaeda, wrote and released a revision document over 400 pages long, in which they renounced the use of violence to change political situations.²¹⁸ So, in this author's assessment, that maybe only an ideological link could exist between the two Algerian and Libyan groups, but each of the groups, LIFG and AQIM, has its own national objectives in their relative countries.

²¹⁷ Ronen Yehudit, "Qadhafi and Militant Islamism: Unprecedented Conflict," *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 4, (2007): 1–16.

²¹⁸ Mohammed Ali Musawi, A Selected Translation of The LIFG Recantation, document on the Quilliam Web site <http://www.quilliamfoundation.org> (accessed July 19, 2009).

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VI. CONCLUSION

A. SUMMATION

After aligning with Al-Qaeda in 2007, the *Salafist* Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) shifted its name to the Al-Qaeda Organization in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Consequently, this name shifting captured the world's attention and led several scholars and policymakers to ask several questions: What is behind this emergence? Is it a signal of weakness or strength? How is it possible to understand the two organizations' real links? What was the level of threat?

This study investigated three hypotheses: (1) this merger is merely an ideological one; (2) this merger is ideological, operational, and material; (3) this merger is merely a rebranding of a failing organization that needed to survive. Looking at the history and evolution of Algerian Islamism, from the rise of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) and the GIA, to the GSPC and AQIM, it appears that hypothesis 3 is the closest to reality and thus the best explanation of the merger between GSPC and Al-Qaeda.

The ever-growing radicalization of Algerian Islamists has its roots in the conflict between the state and Islamists. The repression of the FIS produced the GIA and the interaction between the GIA and the Algerian regime had resulted in the massacre of thousands of civilians, which in turn produced intense internal divisions and fights within this faction. The GIA experienced a split in 1998 with the formation of the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC). The GSPC attempted to regain support by focusing its objective on the Algerian regime, the Algerian security forces, and on attacking Western assets.

The split between the GSPC and the GIA meant the former's rejection of the doctrine of collective excommunication of Muslims (*takfir al-Mujtama*) and the indiscriminate killing of civilians. Despite its efforts to reconstruct and mobilize the Algerian society to recruit more militants to its fronts, the GSPC failed in its new strategy because it was too little, too late—the Algerian public has largely turned against the

radical Islamists. Additional factors contributed to the failure of the GSPC: loss of any international sympathy after 9/11; diversion of Algerian recruits to the war in Iraq in the form of foreign fighters; and the amnesty and reconciliation programs advanced by the Algerian regime in which many fighters and leaders decided to give up and surrender themselves to the Algerian military.

In order to survive, the GSPC reached out to Al-Qaeda's networks and changed its name to Al-Qaeda in Islamic Maghreb land (AQIM) as a last ditch effort to attract support, financing, and legitimacy. Analysis of all the operations carried out since 2007 in North Africa shows that there is little evidence confirming any real operational links between Al-Qaeda and the different radical groups in North Africa such as AQIM, Tunisia's radical networks, the Moroccan Islamic Combat Group (GICM) and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). To be sure, these groups share similar ideological precepts, but this is far from direct operational ties and cooperation.

It is evident that each group was acting separately according to its national contexts and objectives. There was little evidence confirming that AQIM is representing more than an Algerian radical group. Its targeting remains focused on the Algerian regime and its forces as well as foreign interests in Algeria, which has been a consistent strategy of radical Islamists bent on depriving the Algerian state of economic stability and growth.

According to regional experts and the author's assessment, AQIM does not represent a major threat to the U.S. and Western interests outside Algeria. It is possible that AQIM's network of small isolated groups in the camps of the Sahara desert could grow and increase their exploitation of the porous borders shared by Algeria, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. Such developments could threaten foreign nationals as well as regional and foreign interests due to acts of kidnapping, targeting tourists, and smuggling weapons, drugs, and people across borders. This concern is real, but it does not warrant the exceedingly alarming statements by American and European policymakers. Desert camps mainly in the virtually ungoverned regions in Mali and Niger (see map in Appendix 2) may be used to train fighters for attacking American and European interests

in North Africa or in Europe, but these attacks are constrained by AQIM's national objectives as well as by strong states with formidable security services intent on fighting their radical Islamists.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

After two decades of repressing its radical group, the Algerian government was unable to totally defeat it. It is time to take appropriate courses of action to deal with this situation by the Algerian government first, by the neighboring countries and second by the international community.

The Algerian regime has to establish a constitutional review process, designed to produce proposals for restructuring the political system to provide for genuine transparency, greater accountability and free political participation of all parties. As part of this process, the role of the Algerian army within the political system and as an integral component of the political structure must be redefined. In addition, it is necessary to engage in a public and transparent dialogue with all Islamist groups.

Resolving Algeria's issue effectively will also require new thinking and a new approach on the part of the international community. The European states and the European Union have an especially important stake in the outcome of the instability. American and European attitudes towards Algeria have tended to put a premium on maintaining the stability of the regime and containing violence, without paying sufficient attention to the root causes of the conflict. A strong Algerian military has been seen as the best means of keeping a lid on unrest, avoiding massive outward migration and the possible spill-over of terrorist violence into Europe itself. This would preserve Europe's supply of crude oil and natural gas. For their part, several European states have largely accepted that they have no role to play in determining Algeria's future political complexion. This approach has been only partially successful. With a few exceptions, violence has not come ashore in Europe, but has been contained within Algeria; there has been no massive influx of Algerian refugees; and oil and gas has continued to flow. However, as this report demonstrates, the situation remains highly precarious. The country remains in crisis and violence is escalating again.

For that reason, the European countries, mainly France, Italy and Spain have to support a dialogue between the Algerian government and the Islamists by providing facilitation and a venue. The European countries' role is very important in encouraging the Algerian government, applying good governance and respecting the human rights. In addition, they could support the political reconstruction process in Algeria; they could support the growth of a civil society and measures that will end civil violence.

In addition to the European countries' efforts, the Algerian neighbors have a vital role overcoming all their conflicts and improving coordination with regional neighbors to eliminate smuggling routes, cut off any kind of illegal financing, training camps, and terrorist safe havens. The main issue within the Maghreb region is between Algeria and Morocco. Occidental Sahara is used for illegal activities and is harming both countries.

APPENDIX I. SINJAR 2008

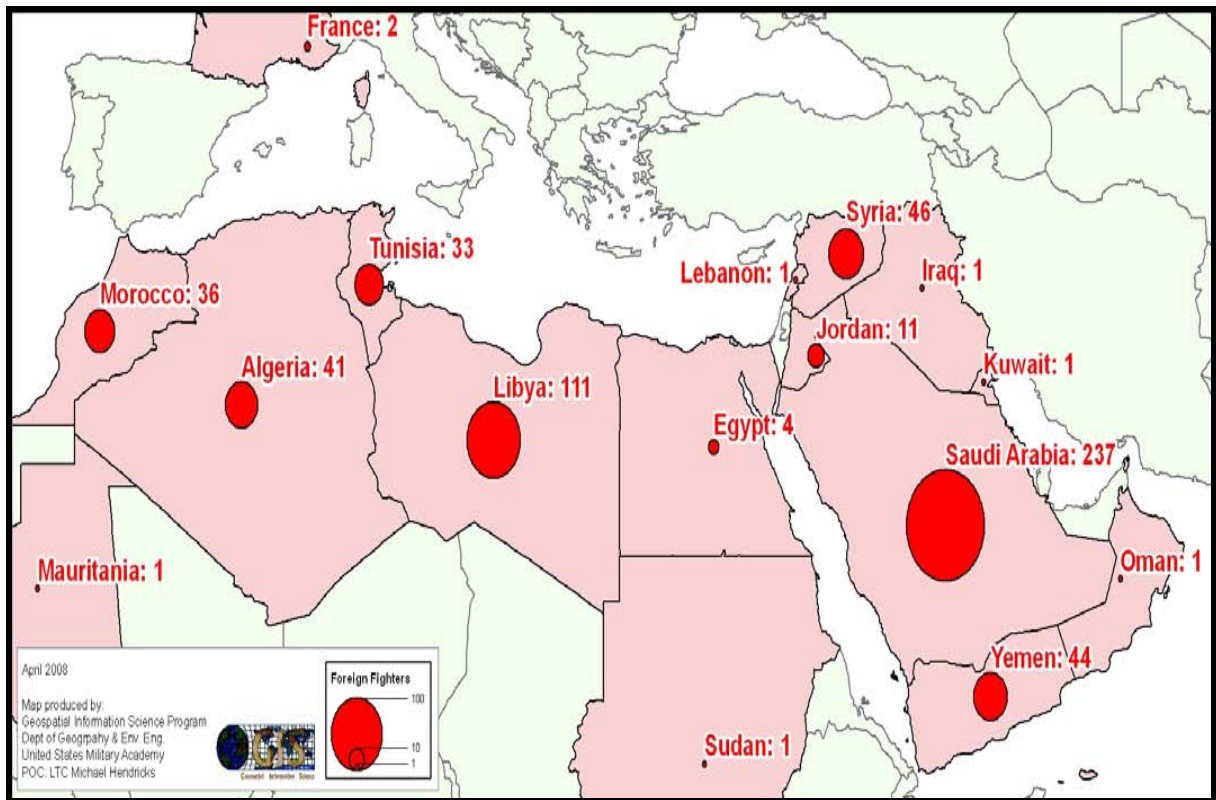


Figure 1. Foreign Fighters by Country of Origin according to the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point Report (From: Bergen, Felter, Brown, and Shapiro, 2008)

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APPENDIX II



Figure 2. The uncontrolled area in the Sahel used as a safe Haven by the AQIM militants (From: Ihajjiten, 2009)

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